THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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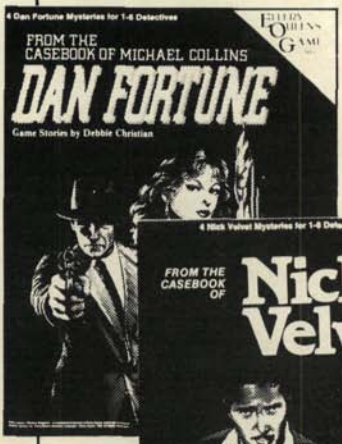
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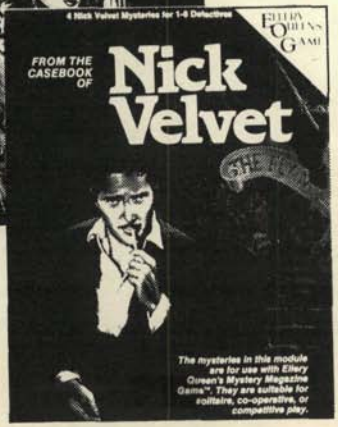
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Contents

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN®

Gypsy at Sea	Edward D. Hoch	**4**
Oracle of the Dead	Peter Lovesey	**20**
Unfamiliar Territory	J. W. Whitehead	**26**
The Move	Deborah Hillyard Clayton	**40**
The Policeman	Terry Mullins	**47**
Einstein and the Little Lord	Robertson Davies	**56**
The Mystery of the Choir Boy	T. S. Stribling	**67**
The Jury Box	Jon L. Breen	**83**
EQMM Readers Award		**86**
A Sound Investment	Monica Quill	**91**
The Visitor	Takashi Atoda	**96**
Joyride	James Sallis	**107**
Two Bards with One Stone	William Bankier	**110**
Quotation Games	Jeffry Scott	**123**
Everybody Goes Home	Robert Twohy	**130**
Index to Volume 92		**156**

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a *NEW* Michael Vlado story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The Quincade *was an impressive ship more than sixty feet long, the sort frequently encountered in Mediterranean waters. Michael remembered them from his boyhood in the early 1960s, and he knew that any man who owned such a craft would not be an easy person to reach. He'd taken a taxi to the thriving port of Piraeus, a suburb of Athens some five miles from the center of the city. The ship lay peacefully at anchor, its gangplank guarded by a burly-looking crewman.*

"I'd like to see Mr. Grimsby if he's aboard," Michael said.

The crewman almost smiled. "The cap'n don't receive visitors."

"Tell him it's about Nita Delvado. I think he'll see me . . . "

GYPSY AT SEA

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The letter arrived in a plain white envelope addressed to Michael Vlado, Gravita, Romania. No other address was needed because everyone in Gravita knew Michael. Since the death of their Gypsy king, Michael had been elevated to the title, though still a relatively young man in his early forties. The news had reached the outside world somehow, picked up by some of the larger metropolitan papers as a filler on an inside page. One such paper had been in Athens, and the first thing Michael saw upon opening the envelope was a clipping with half remembered Greek letters headlined: NEW GYPSY KING FOR REMOTE VILLAGE.

It was the first time he had read Greek in years, and it brought back memories of the period in his youth, a quarter century ago, when he had traveled with a band of Gypsies one summer, harvesting crops up and down the coasts of Greece. That was where

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he'd met a stunning nineteen-year-old girl named Nita Delvado, a Spanish Gypsy with the pure features of a goddess.

The letter in the plain white envelope was from Nita Delvado.

"What is so important there?" Michael's wife Rosanna asked, watching as he read the letter.

"It's from a woman I knew long ago in Greece." He read on a bit. "She wants to see me. She wants me to come to Athens."

"Were you lovers?"

"No. She was a year older than I and there were enough older men in the tribe to keep her interested. We were good friends, though. Close friends."

"You're not going, are you?"

"I think I must."

"Why, Michael?"

"Nita drowned in the Aegean Sea twenty-five years ago. I identified her body."

Had it not been for the eternal vision of the Parthenon looking down from the Acropolis in the middle of the city, Michael might have had difficulty in connecting this modern Athens with the place of his youth. Office buildings sprawled in every direction, and the air was grey with chemical pollution. Now, waiting for the next harvest season, the city's Gypsies lived in old army platoon tents erected in vacant lots. Michael went there first when he arrived.

One of the older Gypsy men recognized him at once. "Michael Vlado! You've come back to us!"

Michael studied the deep-brown eyes beneath the fringe of greying hair and then he remembered. "Hello, Sasha. How have you been?"

"Fine, Michael. You've changed little."

"As have you, my friend," Michael lied. He barely recognized the weathered face before him. A quarter century of harvesting crops beneath the Grecian sun had taken its toll. "How are the others?"

"The ones you knew? Dead, mostly, or wandering again. I have settled down with a wife and children. Three fine boys."

Michael slapped his old friend on the back. He was remembering a day when they were both eighteen and Sasha had told him his name meant Alexander, the conquerer. And Sasha had wanted to be a conquerer in those days. He had apparently settled for something less.

"Are you married, too, Michael?"

"Yes. My wife Rosanna is back in Romania."

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"But no children?"

"Not yet."

"What brings you to Athens, old friend?"

Sasha would probably not have seen the newspaper account of his election as king of the tribe, and Michael saw no point in mentioning it. "I heard recently that Nita Delvado is still alive. Do you remember her?"

"Who could forget her?"

"We thought she'd drowned."

"It was a case of mistaken identity, old friend."

"I saw the body myself, Sasha."

The greying man shrugged. "It's best not to ask questions."

"Have you seen her since her return among the living?"

Sasha glanced away. "Yes, once."

"And?"

"And I asked no questions."

Michael patted his shoulder. "Thank you, Sasha. I'll see you again before I leave Athens."

"Where are you going now? To see her?"

"Yes."

"Be careful, Michael."

As he moved away from the little village of tents, Michael was aware that a Gypsy youth wearing a red scarf was following him. He followed for some time before Michael finally lost him in the city's traffic.

The address on Nita Delvado's letter was a walk-up apartment in an old building in the Vathi section of the city, a few blocks from the Archaeological Museum. Michael rang the bell and a woman's voice came through the speaking tube. "Who's there?"

"Michael Vlado. Is this Nita?"

"Michael! You're here, in Athens?"

"Right downstairs."

"Come up. It will be good to see your face."

The door on the third floor was unlocked, and he found Nita waiting for him. "I thought you were dead," he told her.

She kissed him sweetly on the cheek, as a sister might. In her forties, she was still a lovely woman, and it wasn't until she turned from him that he glimpsed the jagged red scar across her left cheek. "Not dead, no. That was a mistake." She laughed harshly. "Some-

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times I think my entire life has been a mistake." A faint scent of perfume clung to her, like the past.

"Tell me about it."

"I didn't mean to involve you, Michael. When I read of your good fortune—the king of your own tribe at such a young age—I had to write."

"I'm happy you did, though your letter was a shock. Who was it that died that day? Whose body did I identify as yours?"

"Remember Mosha, the Greek girl who worked on the boat with her brother? I'd gone out that day with some others who'd chartered her brother's boat. We were heading for one of the islands for a few days' stay—the island of Kea, not far from the mainland. On the way back, the boat ran into a sudden storm and was wrecked. All five aboard were drowned. After a battering in the sea, Mosha's body was taken for mine. Her brother died, too, so there was no one alive to correct the mistake."

"Except you."

"Except me," she agreed. "I'd stayed behind on Kea."

"Alone?"

"I'd met a man staying at the hotel there. We were having a good time and he persuaded me to remain on the island with him for a few extra days. Then the boat went down and I was reported dead. He said that was perfect for his plans. He was in a line of work where a beautiful woman without a past could earn a great deal of money."

"As a prostitute?" Michael asked cynically.

"No, as a spy."

"Nita, you must be kidding me."

"It seems like a bad joke now, but I was nineteen years old at the time, remember. I had little education and all I had to look forward to was a lifetime of traveling the harvest circuit with the others, in beat-up trucks, living in those awful tents you still see around the city."

"But a *spy?* For whom?"

She shrugged. "Let me get you a drink."

He asked for some ouzo, remembering the pleasing anise flavor from his youth. Her apartment was modestly decorated, and while she busied herself in the kitchen he allowed his eyes to wander about. If spying had been a profitable trade for Nita, there was little sign of it here. Even the television set was a dozen years old. He'd seen newer ones in villages back home.

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When she returned with the drinks, Michael asked, "How long have you lived here?"

"I've been back about four months. Ever since this." She touched the scar on her face.

"How did it happen?"

"A Gypsy cut me. He said I'd betrayed my people."

"Had you?"

"Not in the way he meant. I suppose I've betrayed a great many groups in the past twenty-five years, but I never consciously hurt or betrayed a Gypsy. If you mean did I turn my back on my own people and try to make a life for myself away from them, I suppose I betrayed them in that way. But I was dead after that boat went down. Nita Delvado, the beautiful Gypsy girl, no longer existed. I was a new person."

"Who did you work for?" he asked again.

"Only one person—Alec Grimsby, the man who recruited me."

Michael's eyebrows went up. "British?"

"A British citizen, yes. He hasn't been home in twenty years. He runs a free-lance intelligence network in the Middle East. When I met him on Kea he was working for Israel. Now much of his work is for the other side, the Palestinians."

"And you've devoted your life to this sort of foolhardiness?" Michael couldn't believe it. "It's a wonder you haven't been killed."

"I'm out of it now," she said. "That Gypsy's knife ended my career."

"Surely you can have plastic surgery."

"I will have it, but it means several operations and skin grafts over a period of three years. I'm forty-four now. In three years Alec will have replaced me with someone younger."

"Has he given you money?"

She nodded. "Enough for a modest living. And he promises to pay for the operations."

"You could write a book about your experiences. It might bring big money."

"I have never written anything longer than a letter."

"A publisher could arrange for a collaborator."

"It would mean exposing Alec. I couldn't do that."

"Is he your lover?"

"He was, for all those years."

Michael finished his drink in anger. "He used you, Nita, and now he's throwing you aside."

"Maybe I wanted to be used. I was nineteen and without a friend."

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"I was always your friend," Michael said softly.

She glanced at her watch. "Thank you for saying that, Michael. Now you must go. I have an appointment soon and I must change for it."

"You asked me to come all this way to see you, Nita, to welcome you back among the living."

She smiled sadly. "I should never have written you. I was better off in your memory."

"No," he protested, but she had gotten to her feet and was moving toward the door.

"Goodbye, Michael. We will not see each other again."

He paused at the door. "The Gypsy who cut you—he must have recognized you from the past."

"Yes."

"Who was he?"

"An old friend of both of us. Remember Sasha?"

After he left the apartment, Michael circled the block and returned to wait in a doorway across the street, curious to see who Nita's visitor might be.

Within twenty minutes, a French-made limousine pulled up to the curb and a tall white-haired man got out. He appeared to be in his fifties, and when he told the driver to wait for him he spoke in English. Michael had little doubt it was Alec Grimsby.

He waited in the doorway, but after a half hour passed he grew tired of it. Whatever they were doing up there was none of his business. He walked back through the narrow streets to the little hotel where he was staying. It had been an afternoon of conjuring up memories of other days, of feeling emotions he didn't fully understand. There was Nita, whom he might have loved years ago, and Sasha, a friend from the same past. But what was their relationship to each other, and what had caused Sasha to cut her face like that?

Michael was just crossing the street in front of his hotel when he again saw the Gypsy boy with the red scarf who had followed him from Sasha's encampment. Michael entered the lobby and walked quickly to a side door. Slipping out into the late-afternoon crowd, he circled back to the front of the hotel in time to see the youth pause in front of the building. Michael walked quickly up to him and fastened a steely grip on his shoulder.

"Let go!" the boy cried, trying to break free, but Michael hung on.

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"I want to talk to you." The youth was in his early teens and, close up, there was little doubt who he was. Michael had seen that same crafty expression too many times before. "You're one of Sasha's sons, aren't you?"

"So what if I am? I was just walking on the street!"

"You were following me. You followed me when I left your father's tent."

The boy struggled to get loose, but Michael forced him against the building. A few passersby glanced at them curiously and hurried on, perhaps concluding that Michael had caught the Gypsy boy in the act of picking his pocket.

"I didn't do anything wrong!" the youth insisted.

"Your father and I were boys together. What's your name?"

"Alberto," he replied after some hesitation.

"Well, Alberto—" Michael adopted a more friendly tone of voice "—you are quite clever at trailing people. Your red scarf is too easy to spot in a crowd, but otherwise you have developed all the right skills. I was certain I'd lost you once, before I reached that apartment in the Vathi district. How were you able to stick with me without my knowing it?"

The boy looked down at the sidewalk, then apparently decided to share his secret. "There was a man following you, too—a man I've noticed hanging around our tents. When I saw him follow you, I followed him."

"What does he look like?"

"He has dark hair and a beard. Sometimes he carries an artist's easel and rolled-up canvas, like a painter."

"All right," Michael said, relaxing his grip on the boy's shoulder. "Run along now and report to your father. Tell him I'll be seeing him soon."

Michael spent a restless night. He had seen Nita Delvado and heard at least the broad outlines of her story. By rights he should be getting the train back home to Romania. But should Nita be warned about this man who had followed him to her apartment? In her line of work, one could collect a great many enemies in twenty-five years.

By morning he had decided. He would visit her one more time before he left. And he would visit Sasha, too, as he had promised. The morning air was warm, so he decided to walk to Nita's apartment as he had the previous day. Traffic seemed heavy for a Sat-

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urday morning, but he reminded himself that he knew nothing of this city as it was today.

There was a car in front of Nita's building, and for a moment Michael thought it might be Alec Grimsby's limousine again. Then he realized it was an official car with a police seal on the door. A uniformed officer stood guard.

"What's the trouble?" Michael asked. "I'm a friend of Nita Delvado, who lives here."

The officer spoke quickly to a man inside the entranceway, his Greek too fast for Michael to understand. The second man motioned Michael inside and led him upstairs to Nita's apartment. A man in a braided uniform, obviously in charge, stood just inside her door.

"Did you know the dead woman?" he asked.

Michael looked down at the body in the center of the floor, the scarred cheek turned toward him. She was wearing the same dress as the day before. "Yes," he managed to say. "Her name was Nita Delvado."

She had been shot once in the chest at close range, the officer told Michael. Since none of the neighbors heard a shot, the killer may have used a silencer. It had happened sometime during the night, probably after midnight. "Did she have any enemies?" the officer asked.

"I saw her yesterday for the first time in twenty-five years," Michael explained. "She wrote to me recently, saying she'd like to see me again. I came here to visit her. She told me a little of her past life. She may have had enemies, but she mentioned no one by name."

They questioned him further, and took his name and address. "Do you know where she got the scar?" one of them asked.

"No," Michael answered, thinking of Sasha. Likewise, there was no point in mentioning Alec Grimsby or the mysterious bearded man. If any of them had had a hand in her death, he'd need evidence to prove it.

Finally they let him go. He wandered the streets aimlessly for an hour, to be certain the police weren't following him, then he headed for the Gypsy encampment in the vacant lot near the markets.

For the weekend tourists, the Gypsy women had set out card tables and folding chairs, and were telling fortunes—reading palms and interpreting the fall of Tarot cards in exchange for a few coins. Michael found Sasha far away from this activity, talking with some

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of the men of the tribe. His son Alberto hovered nearby, playing with a jackknife.

"May I speak with you?" Michael asked.

Sasha nodded. "Of course, Michael. Alberto told me about yesterday. I hope you don't think I sent him to spy on you. He is a good boy, but he goes off on his own too much. I had no need of Nita's address, and if I did I would have asked you for it."

"Nita is dead, Sasha. Someone murdered her during the night."

"What are you saying!" He seemed truly surprised.

"Someone shot her in her apartment. This morning a neighbor noticed the door was ajar and found the body."

"I can't believe it." Sasha seemed to sag noticeably at the news. "Was she robbed?"

"Apparently not, and there was no sign of a forced entry. She seemed to have known her killer."

"Alberto said a bearded man followed her. Perhaps it was someone from her past life."

"Perhaps," Michael agreed. "You said you saw her once. How much did she tell you of that past life?"

"She mentioned a man named Grimsby. She'd been shopping at the market and I came upon her accidentally. I'd heard rumors she was alive, but the meeting was still a shock for us both. I couldn't believe my eyes."

"When was this?"

Sasha thought. "Probably three or four months ago now. I remember it was the beginning of the good weather, before we went off on the circuit to help with the planting."

"Did you argue?"

Sasha looked away. "Why would we argue?"

"She said you did."

"It was foolish. At first I couldn't believe it was really Nita. I kept telling her she was dead. Finally, when she convinced me, I welcomed her back. I thought she had come to live with us, but she was only passing through. She said she could never come back to this sort of life, the Gypsy life was what she'd escaped from. The way she said it—I'm afraid I slapped her, Michael. I think you would have done the same."

"Sasha—"

"She'd fallen in with bad people."

"People like Alec Grimsby? Were you upset because she'd been living with that man? Because she rejected her Gypsy heritage?"

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"Yes." His voice was soft, ashamed.

"One more question, Sasha. Did you cut her face with a knife?"

"*Cut* her? Certainly not. I only slapped her."

"Did she have a scar on her cheek?"

"Not then. Alberto told me later that he saw her on the street and she was scarred."

"She said you did it."

"That was a lie!"

"Alberto seems to know everything," Michael commented. "Come here, boy!" he called out to Sasha's son, who was still playing with his knife.

"What do you want?" Alberto asked suspiciously.

"You seem to know what's going on. Where would I find this Englishman Grimsby, the one who was with Nita Delvado that day?"

"The one who came to her apartment after you left yesterday?"

"That's the one."

"Is it worth money?" the boy asked slyly.

Michael laughed. "He learns well from his father." He took a gold coin from his pocket and handed it over. "Now tell me."

"On his boat in the harbor. The motor yacht, *Quincade*. I followed him there one day. He only returned to Athens recently."

Michael nodded his thanks and turned to take his leave of Sasha. "Are you going there?" Sasha asked.

"I am. I think Grimsby can tell me who killed Nita."

The *Quincade* was an impressive ship more than sixty feet long, the sort frequently encountered in Mediterranean waters. Michael remembered them from his boyhood in the early 1960s, and he knew that any man who owned such a craft would not be an easy person to reach. He'd taken a taxi to the thriving port area of Piraeus, a suburb of Athens some five miles from the center of the city. The ship lay peacefully at anchor, its gangplank guarded by a burly-looking crewman.

"I'd like to see Mr. Grimsby if he's aboard," Michael said.

The crewman almost smiled. "The cap'n don't receive visitors."

"Tell him it's about Nita Delvado. I think he'll see me."

The crewman shrugged and disappeared up the gangway. While Michael waited, he watched a boat at the next dock unloading nets full of sponges taken from the nearby water. Presently the man returned and said, "Follow me."

Alec Grimsby, the white-haired man Michael had first seen en-

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tering Nita's apartment the previous day, was seated on a roofed deck in the stern of the yacht, sipping a tall glass of iced tea. He rose and offered his hand as Michael joined him. "Nita mentioned you," he said. "It is a terrible thing about her."

"You learned about it quickly."

The Englishman smiled and sat down again, offering Michael a chair. Up close he seemed younger, and there was something a bit debonair about him. Michael caught a whiff of the aftershave or cologne he'd first smelled at Nita's apartment. "The police have already been here," Grimsby told him. "A neighbor told them about my visits."

"Were you with her last night?"

Grimsby shook his head. "I saw her earlier, to say goodbye. I'm leaving port today. I have business matters elsewhere."

"Nita told me you'd been friends for twenty-five years."

"A long time, yes."

"She told me the sort of thing she did for you."

Alec Grimsby squinted at Michael. After a moment, he suggested a glass of tea. "Gypsies drink tea, don't they?"

"Not this early in the day," Michael answered. "I came here to ask you about Nita, and who would have wanted to kill her. I've been followed by a bearded man who sometimes carries artist's materials. Would he have had reason to kill her?"

Grimsby smiled. "I have no idea what sort of a life Nita has had here in Athens. She left my employ some months ago."

"How many people like her do you have, risking their lives to line your pockets?"

The smile froze on his face. "Whatever she did was of her own free will."

"Why did she return to Athens?"

"For plastic surgery on her face. She came back four months ago."

Michael took a deep breath. "In the Romanian newspapers I read about the prostitutes in New York. They have pimps who keep watch over them. The pimps drive around in big fancy cars. In a way, the Mediterranean isn't so different from New York, except that here the stakes are higher."

"I will not be lectured to by a Gypsy," Grimsby told him, his face frozen with controlled rage. "Go back to Romania or wherever you came from."

"Did you cut her face?"

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"That's a Gypsy trick. You are wearing a knife on your belt right now."

"*Did* you?" Michael repeated.

Grimsby must have pressed some hidden button—suddenly the burly sailor was lifting Michael from his chair, gripping him in a bearhug. "Time to go, mate!"

Michael doubled over, lifting the man's feet from the floor and then quickly shifting his weight to roll him off his hip. The sailor went down hard, then came back up with a knife in his hand. Michael quickly drew his own weapon.

Grimsby barked an order to his man in a language Michael didn't know. "I want no blood on my deck," he said in English. "Get out of here, Gypsy!"

"If you killed her, I'll be back for you!" Michael said over his shoulder as he walked toward the gangplank.

Somehow Nita Delvado, a woman who had been dead for him for twenty-five years, had become very important during her brief rebirth.

Michael found Sasha at the fish market, looking over the day's catch while the women of the tribe used their fortune-telling money to buy food for the table. "We'll be on the road again in two weeks," he told Michael. "Sometimes I think it's not so bad. At least we get out in the fresh air, away from the city's pollution."

"Sasha, I have to ask you something."

"What is it, my friend?"

"That day four months ago when you saw Nita. You told me you didn't cut her."

"I didn't. My God, Michael, I would never use a knife on any woman!"

"And she had no scar that you noticed."

"I told you that."

"On which cheek did you slap her?"

"Which cheek? Michael, what difference does it make? I am right-handed. I was facing her, so I must have hit her on the left cheek."

Michael nodded. "The one with the scar. Isn't it possible that your nail caught her flesh and tore it without your realizing it?"

"No, it is not. I felt bad as soon as I did it and I looked at her cheek. It was red from the slap, but the skin wasn't broken. She was crying, her face already wet from the rain—"

"What?"

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"She was crying—"

"You didn't mention the rain before."

"Michael, do I have to give you a report on the weather conditions? It was raining. What difference does that make?"

"All the difference in the world—" Michael turned and ran for a taxi, hoping he was not too late.

But the Saturday-afternoon traffic had moved in, and his second journey to the docks at Piraeus took longer. By the time he reached the berth of the *Quincade*, there was no sign of the motor yacht.

Michael ran to the sponge fisherman at the next dock. "I'm looking for the *Quincade*. It was anchored there a few hours ago."

The fisherman shrugged. "Gone. Sailed with the tide."

"Where to?"

"Who knows? Perhaps to one of the islands. Everyone goes to the islands in summer."

Michael felt defeated. He stared out at the horizon, hoping for a sign.

The islands—

"Is there a ferry to Kea?"

"Yes, but it takes three hours."

"Where does it dock?" The fisherman pointed and Michael waved his thanks and ran, catching the Kea ferry as it was about to depart.

For the entire time of the crossing, he stood in the bow, feeling the warm salt air against his face. Finally, when the rocky shorelines of Kea came into view, he saw that the fates were with him. The motor yacht *Quincade* was riding at anchor.

When he left the ferry, he started toward it, then changed his mind. Not the yacht. A hotel.

At the taxi-service stand, he asked a driver, "Where is your best hotel?"

"Straight ahead," the man answered, indicating a building of glass and chrome.

"No, I want something that would have been here twenty-five years ago."

"You mean the Kythnos. I can take you there."

It was an older white-stone building that showed signs of aging. At the dinner hour a rear terrace had a few diners, and Michael saw that he'd guessed correctly. Alec Grimsby was seated at a table off

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to one side, dining with a woman companion. He half rose from his chair as he saw Michael approaching.

Michael barely glanced at him. It was the woman he'd come to find. She was blonde now and there was no scar on her cheek, but he would have known her anywhere. "Hello, Nita," he said.

She stared up at him coolly, without surprise. "Hello, Michael. Will you join us for dessert?"

"Only for talk," he said, pulling up a chair. He hadn't eaten since breakfast, but just then he had no appetite.

"Don't try any funny business," Alec Grimsby warned. "My crewmen are armed, and only minutes away."

"My mind doesn't run to funny business, certainly not to anything as devious as the two of you."

"I had to do it, Michael," Nita said. "An Israeli assassin has been on my trail."

"So you decided to die again. It worked so well the first time, you figured it might give you another twenty-five years. And you brought me back because I was the one who misidentified you the first time."

"It wasn't like that at all," she tried to explain. "When I wrote and said I wanted to see you again, I meant it. But I had no certainty you'd come before I had to disappear again, no certainty the police would show you the body."

"Who was it, by the way? Who died for you this time?"

"Mosha's death twenty-five years ago was an accident. Alec didn't recruit me until after it happened, when it appeared my supposed death could be put to some real use. We had a good living, but four months ago we learned there was a price on our heads. Alec had seen a woman on Majorca who looked amazingly like me, except that she had a bad scar on her left cheek. She was a prostitute. I returned to Athens and let myself be seen by neighbors and a few old friends with a paste scar. I applied it with makeup every morning and touched it up when necessary. The assassin had tracked me to Athens by this time, but he waited to see if Alec would show, so he could kill us both. When Alec did come, he had the Majorca woman with him on the yacht. We exchanged places."

"And you killed her."

"She died," Grimsby said. "But how did you know Nita was alive? How did you know where to find us?"

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Michael shook his head, unable to accept their cool dispassion. "Is that all a human life means to you?"

"How did you know?" Grimsby repeated. "If we slipped up somewhere—"

"The makeup was good, and you arranged the body perfectly. When the neighbor found it, and when I saw it later, the first thing we saw was the scar. You even dressed her in the same clothes Nita wore yesterday. So I saw the scar and the clothes—your scar, your clothes, your apartment, Nita—and I didn't need to study the face. But there *was* one thing that bothered me. You said you'd come to Athens for plastic surgery on your scar, but you also said a Gypsy cut you. When pressed, you said it was Sasha.

"But both things couldn't be true. If you came to Athens for surgery, then you had the scar before you met Sasha again. He said you didn't have it when he met you, and that stumped me for a while. But then he told me it was raining that day. I decided you'd gone out on some quick errand and hadn't bothered with the fake scar, fearful the rain would expose it for what it was. My suspicion of a false scar made me remember two other things. When I left you yesterday, you said you had to change your clothes for an appointment, yet the dead woman was wearing the dress you'd had on. You might have changed back into it, of course, but there was something else—the scent of your perfume in the apartment. I smelled it today on board the *Quincade*. At first I thought it was Grimsby's cologne. But Grimsby didn't come to your apartment until after I'd left, and cologne wouldn't have lingered from his last visit. It was your perfume I smelled, Nita, and I smelled it again on the yacht because you were there. You were probably listening to our conversation from behind a cabin door."

"And so you've followed us here to Kea," she said.

"It's where you both were twenty-five years ago. I thought you might be sentimental enough to come back to the same place for your second funeral."

"What do you plan to do?" Grimsby asked. "We're beyond the jurisdiction of the Athens police."

"I plan to do nothing," Michael said, and stood up. "Nothing."

"Michael—" Nita called as he walked away, but she did not come after him.

As he boarded the ferry, he saw a bearded man getting off, carrying an easel and a roll of canvas. All the way back to Athens, he tried not to think of what might have been inside the canvas . . .

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He took the morning train to Romania, and seated in the coach with the Sunday paper he found the story on page 2, under a headline that read: TWO SLAIN ON KEA. It was a brief story, with more details promised in later editions: "A wealthy British businessman and a woman companion were slain Saturday as they finished dinner on the terrace of their hotel on the island of Kea. A lone assassin opened fire with a submachine gun and escaped in the ensuing panic. The dead man was identified as Alec Grimsby, in his fifties, said to have close ties to various Middle Eastern factions. The woman killed with him has not been identified."

DETECTIVERSE

FIERY WARNING

by ROSAMOND C. BUSKIRK

Warm praises to Edward D. Hoch
And his stories of flammable folk—
So many of them
In EQMM—
If you fire him, there will be smoke.

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

A second story set in Greece—this time Corfu, with a honeymooning couple from England. A light-seeming story with an afterjolt, from the ever-inventive, ever-surprising, ever-welcome Peter Lovesey . . .

ORACLE OF THE DEAD

by PETER LOVESEY

"The Oracle of the Dead is not to be missed," said the tour representative. "It doesn't sound like a bunch of laughs, I know, but it makes a fascinating sea trip. I see the honeymooners shaking their heads. Other things on your mind, eh? Personally, if I'd come all this way I'd want to visit at least one historical site, and that's the one I recommend."

He started taking names.

Outside, the warmth and color of Corfu waited to be experienced. Helen felt David's hand tighten around hers. "Let's slip away," he murmured.

She was only too happy to go. She'd put up with as many easy laughs about newlyweds as she could take, particularly after David and she had made no secret that this was their second time around. They were both past thirty-five.

"Everything he told us is in the brochures, anyway," said David as they jigged into Corfu Town in a victoria drawn by a horse wearing a straw hat.

The scents of jasmine and orange blossom were on the air. Helen leaned back and felt the sun on her face and sighed happily.

"Incredible!" said David.

Helen was staring at the sky. "What?"

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"A cricket pitch."

"Cricket?" She sat forward and saw that he was right. "Give me strength! Not here!"

"Is true," Georgios, their driver, turned and informed them. "Crickets this afternoon. Esplanade Square. Famous crickets field more than hundred years, since British rule Corfu."

"That's this afternoon taken care of," said David.

"You'd better be joking," said Helen, without much confidence that he was. Cricket took up every Saturday and Sunday in summer. If he wasn't playing for the local team, he was off to a one-day match at the Oval. She'd been hoping that marriage would wean him away from the silly game.

"Got to give it a try," he said, trying to sound reasonable. "See what the standard's like out here."

"It's our honeymoon."

"I know, love. If it's poor stuff, we'll find something better to do."

Stung by his remark, Helen turned and found herself looking at the bronze statue of a former high commissioner who had probably started it all.

"You play crickets, sir?" she heard Georgios ask David. "Maybe you get a game. You like me to find out?"

So Helen found herself that afternoon seated behind the boundary line, bored, hurt, and humiliated. It made no difference that David waved to her between overs. It made no difference that other women had been persuaded to watch. This was the first day of her honeymoon.

She wasn't certain how long she endured it. She took no interest in the cricket even when there was clapping. She sat with her eyes closed.

"You don't like see your husband bat?"

She looked up into the bearded face of Georgios.

"You like to do something else?"

She shook her head.

"Come on," he coaxed her. "I take you nice ride."

She was about to say no, imagining David looking across the field and seeing the empty chair, when the idea suddenly had some attraction. He'd just assumed she would dutifully sit watching all afternoon as she did at home. But she hadn't promised to remain there—a small shock to his complacency might not come amiss.

She got up . . .

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Georgios drove her up one of the main streets giving glimpses of flagstoned lanes, tall houses linked by bridges, and ornate balconies festooned with washing. Presently she saw the blue-green strip of the sea again.

"This the harbor," explained Georgios. "Now you meet my cousin Spyros."

"I don't want to meet anybody."

"Spyros has beautiful speedboat."

She had evidently been brought here for a sea trip. To protest was futile. Cousin Spyros, dark-skinned and athletic in build, wearing black jeans and white T-shirt, was waiting on the quay beside a sleek white boat.

"I must get back to the cricket," Helen said.

"Plenty time," said Georgios. "Crickets go on many hours."

"I don't have enough money with me."

"No need moneys," he said in a shocked tone.

She'd heard of the tradition of hospitality in Corfu. You could give grave offense if you tried to pay for something that was freely given.

Spyros apparently spoke no English. He helped her into the boat and started the engine. Georgios shouted that he would wait for her and then the boat careered toward the open sea. Helen's long black hair lifted from her back. The boat bucked and bounced at incredible speed. She would have adored sharing the experience with David.

They headed toward the purple land-mass of mainland Greece and saw it turn steadily green and brown as they approached. For a few minutes they followed the shoreline, then Spyros steered into a river estuary and cut the engine. They glided to a landing-stage under a willow.

Spyros gestured to her to climb out. Helen shook her head. He was insistent. He said something angry in Greek and flapped his hands at her. She obeyed, realizing that she relied on his good will to get back to Corfu.

Some people were walking up a barren, rocky hill toward what looked like a church. She glanced back at Spyros. He nodded and pointed, so she started the climb. At the top was a man selling admission tickets, but the church wasn't the attraction. A set of steps led down into a massive pillared structure built into a natural cave.

Ahead of Helen a voice said in English, "So this is where Odysseus came to visit the underworld, the kingdom of Hades. Brave men came here to consult the oracle."

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The Oracle of the Dead. Helen shivered. She hadn't wanted to visit this place. A hand pressed against her back, pushing her forward, into a corridor that became a labyrinth.

The voice said something about rituals and sacrifices. Helen found herself being ushered through an arched entrance into a dimly lit vault. Chill air prickled her flesh. "So we come to the inner chamber, once guarded by the priests," the voice announced with an eerie echo. "Here, if you got so far, you might put a question to the oracle, and you might see the shades of the dead rise up. But you were sworn to keep secret whatever you saw and heard. The punishment for breaking this oath was death. Some say the power of the oracle remains. You are welcome to try if you wish."

All I wish, thought Helen, is to get out of this dreadful place. Immediately a horrid image flashed into her mind of David wrapped in a shroud and lying in a coffin, deathly white except for the mark of a bruise on his forehead. With a sob she turned and pushed her way frantically toward the exit.

From the jetty, Spyros grinned and waved. Helen ran down the steep slope. "Take me away. Something dreadful has happened."

Although he didn't understand, he appreciated that she was in a state of shock. He produced a blanket for her, then he cast off and set the speedboat racing toward Corfu. All the way, Helen couldn't shift that terrible image from her brain.

Georgios met them at the harbor, grim-faced. Something was said in Greek. He reached out to help Helen ashore. As she settled into the victoria, she started to slip the blanket off her shoulders. "No, no," said Georgios. "You keep."

"What's happened?" Helen asked. "Take me to the cricket field!"

"Crickets is finished today," said Georgios tersely as he whipped up the horse. They drove in another direction, skirting the hill dominated by the fortress that overlooks the town. Some way up a main road, they wheeled sharp right into the Corfu Hospital grounds.

"No," moaned Helen. "No, please, no."

Georgios stopped at the casualty department and they went inside together. They were met by a sister who spoke in a subdued voice to Georgios, their eyes on Helen. She felt the blood draining from her head. She swayed and pitched forward. Someone must have caught her, because she wasn't conscious of hitting the floor.

She came round by degrees, sensing first that she was lying in

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bed. Her eyes struggled to focus. She could see venetian blinds. People were nearby, speaking English—if only she could catch more than a few words at a time.

"Full force of the bat—sheer bad luck."

She found her voice and said, "He's dead, isn't he?"

Someone said, "She's coming round."

"David," she said. "My husband. He was hit in the face. I know it."

"No, dear."

To her amazement, David spoke. "You're a bit muddled, darling, and no wonder. You were sitting with your eyes closed and someone made a big hit. The ball struck you on the forehead. You were brought straight here from the cricket field. You've got a nasty bruise and some concussion, but they promise me you'll be all right."

She could focus better now. It was certainly David, and he wasn't marked.

She was profoundly relieved to see him, even if she couldn't quite believe it. She squeezed his hand.

He said, "You must have imagined things while you were concussed."

"It was very real. I was taken there in a speedboat."

"Where?" David asked. "Tell me about it."

She hesitated. "No. I'm not at liberty to say. But one thing I will tell you: you've played your last game of cricket."

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a *NEW* short story by

J. W. WHITEHEAD

Another story about honeymooners, this couple Americans in England. We wonder: perhaps we should have lined up this story and the two preceding it in different order—first Mr. Hoch's (set in Greece) a look into the past, then this one by Mr. Whitehead a look at the present, followed by Mr. Lovesey's (back in Greece) a possible look into the future.

Admittedly, the fast-approaching twenty-first century has been making us unusually time-conscious. Possibly it is doing the same for you and for our contributors—especially those who enjoy science fiction as well as mystery fiction. EQMM will be fifty-nine years old in the year 2000. Again we wonder: what kind of world will be reflected in the stories we publish then . . .

UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

by J. W. WHITEHEAD

The receiver over which James took down the directions was filled with the same dull rush and swell he remembered loving as a child, a conch shell pressed to his ear. Mrs. Pym's voice speaking through the line was small and magical, telling him of a journey through farmfields and downs, in one-lane roads where he must keep his tires in the ruts. She murmured something about what would befall them if he couldn't keep the tires within the ruts, but she murmured it too low and dark for him to divine it over the invisible surf. And then his 10p ran out, and the line rang off and fell to that ominous silence he'd always loathed in English telephones.

"So do we know where we're going?" said Betsy when James returned to the car. "You looked kind of angry there at the end."

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"It's this damned English telephone system. I never thought I'd appreciate AT&T, but all of a sudden I'd give anything to talk to a snippy operator."

"So do we know where we're going?" she said again. James considered whether she might actually doubt him, and decided she was just making conversation. James and Betsy had been married for four days, and James felt responsible for the success of their honeymoon. "Mrs. Pym said it will be about an hour and a half from here, as long as we stay in the ruts."

"In the ruts?"

"That's what she said. She told me we'd know soon enough. I take it we're traveling crosscountry, sort of as the crow flies."

"If the crow has a broken wing, anyway."

He used the opportunity to pull back onto the throughway as a cover for having no quick reply. These early days of their marriage seemed fraught with conversational peril, each of them walking a highwire of wit that threatened to spin off into a disaster of ill-humor. At first it had seemed of little importance that after he'd driven the car away from the rental-car terminal and noticed the Rover sported a cassette deck they'd stopped at a music shop and bought some tapes. In retrospect, it seemed they'd both been thinking ahead to hours on these thin roads, fearing the dangers of silence.

They stopped in a small town whose name they immediately forgot when they passed the borough sign. It was late for lunch, and they knew it, but they tried up and down the street just the same. They finally found a small place that looked a little rough around the edges. The squat, unshaven proprietress within told them they could have cheese sandwiches if they wanted. They took the offer, and room-temperature sweet cider to wash them down.

James thought the cider *too* sweet. The woman watched Betsy while she ate. From the back room of the pub, they could hear a radio reporting a sporting event, but James couldn't recognize the terminology and Betsy was trying to ignore the stray crackles of the broadcast altogether. The woman yelled into the back room for the radio to be turned down, but she never took her eyes off Betsy. James knew Betsy would be mad at the world for having the woman stare at her while she ate, and so he tried to deflect the woman's attention with inane touristry. The woman grunted replies and continued to watch Betsy timidly gnaw at her sandwich.

"These certainly are good sandwiches," James said at last.

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"And I suppose you could do better, then?" said the woman, but not to him.

Betsy got up and pulled James out of the booth. "Let's get out of here," she said.

James knew he'd missed something. There were times when he'd almost convinced himself that men and women were common denominators, that marriage worked because the puzzling things of men and women were simply the puzzling things common to human beings and could eventually be understood by their partners. But then he would wake up.

"What was going on in there?" he said outside.

"Just a mutual dislike, I guess. I pity her poor husband in the back."

"How do you know that's her husband in the back?"

"I don't, but it seems like a safe guess. James, don't trouble yourself with it."

In the car, she punched a tape into the deck and began singing with Roy Orbison.

James said, "I think we're both going to feel better after we get there and can lie down a while."

"Undoubtedly," she said, between words of the song.

"Are you happy to be here?" he asked. He didn't want to make the question any more specific. A simple affirmation would suffice.

There was a short pause. It was the sort of pause he appreciated in her. It indicated to James that the answer would be honest.

"Yes," she said.

"Me, too."

The trip took on the uneventful quietude of a weekend trip to Betsy's mother's house. Betsy eventually stopped singing and fell asleep. James glanced over at her occasionally as he drove, watching for the road signs Mrs. Pym had told him would appear. He had almost stopped believing the signs existed when he actually saw them, galloping across the long green and yellow fields toward the Rover. The last sign for which he was to look before arriving at the Pyms' farm was the sign of the Black Anvil. Mrs. Pym had been no more explicit than that. James assumed it must be a small backwater pub.

He briefly took his eyes off the road to look at Betsy—her eyelids lowered, her mouth slightly open, a faint regular breathing escaping as huskily and lyrically as muted music, her hand carelessly fallen

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in her lap. He reached over, eyes shifting industriously between the road and his wife, and touched the crown of her head. She hardly stirred. He took her peacefulness for an affirmation.

The countryside of England failed to stir him as did the imaginary countryside of their future together. The fields, taken one by one, were beautiful: barren-looking in their brilliant expanses of fertility. Smudges of livestock stood like rocks in the far fields. The sky had clouded, but not with rain. James had been to England enough times to know that this was the cast under which the fields rolled down to the sea. It was easy on the eyes. He liked the small, sharp chill he felt from the air, warning away lulls.

The sky was dark when the Rover pulled up beside the sign of the Black Anvil at midafternoon.

"What *time* is it?" Betsy said, opening her eyes.

"Just after three o'clock." James peered at the sign.

The sign was old, and the pub it belonged to looked much older. Neither sign nor pub was in the remotest sense aware of itself.

"Looks like a real place," James said.

He turned the car back into the ruts and they wobbled into a one-lane path parted through absurdly tall vegetation, which otherwise looked like rye. As they drove, the feeling was strong with both of them that the ruts of the path, the stalks brushing the sides of the car, the lay of the path itself, left them no option but to press on. There was no space in which to turn back. The sky stayed dark, and the stalks rubbed bruskly against their windows.

"I expect that when we come through this, we'll be in another land," said Betsy. Her aside fell on silence.

The path emptied onto a road that, at the beginning of sunset, looked like something from an Impressionist study of light. A row of trees, tall and thin as telephone poles, lined the opposite side of the road for at least three or four fields, almost to the horizon. The air moved through them and the low sky glistened among the branches. James took a right, then a left, through the wall of trees, and the rutted path in time became lined by a wooden fence. They passed a sign that said, simply, PYM. And the path spilled them into a cul-de-sac at the Pyms' farmhouse.

Outside the car, they stretched their legs and listened to the lowing of cattle out in the field to their left. The air stung with its chill and strangeness. A family of ducks wobbled around the car to peer up at them.

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"You've made it, then," said a voice from behind them. James knew it to be the voice of Mrs. Pym and turned to find himself face to face with a great lioness of a woman—tall and broad, with huge grey hands and feet, and hair as coarse as straw brushing against her shoulders. She wore a sundress and her feet were naked. In her hands she carried a gardening implement of some sort. James guessed her to be in her late thirties, though she could have been anywhere from twenty to fifty-five.

"Mrs. Pym?" said Betsy.

"That's right, dear. You'll want to see your room. Come along, then. I'll show you what's what."

She brushed past them, but before she shot off toward the house, she knelt in front of the ducks and began to speak with them, a collection of nonsense about welcoming visitors and minding the driveway when in use and when feeding would be administered for the evening. James and Betsy exchanged a look, waiting patiently.

"Right," said Mrs. Pym, straightening. James noted she had the body of a quarterback: thick arms and calves, long back. She said, "This way." Off she marched, and they followed.

All three of them had to stoop when entering the bedroom. There were two high single beds, with an oil lamp on a simple table between them. The room contained the bric-a-brac of an English farm: planters, book-club editions, odd stones, tintypes. A large stone in the otherwise plastered wall had *1434* carved into it.

Betsy pointed to it. "Does that mean—"

"This part of the house is over five hundred years old, of course," said Mrs. Pym. "Now you'll want to know of places to see in the area. I've set out brochures. There's still at least an hour before dark."

James put down their bags and sat himself on the nearer of the two beds. "Thank you," he said, "but I think we'll just rest before dinner."

"You're not expecting dinner from me, are you?"

"No," said Betsy quickly. "Is the Black Anvil a good place to eat?"

"It will do. You'll want an adventure while you're here, I suppose."

When Mrs. Pym left, James swung his feet up onto the bed and rested them gently on the blanket at the foot. "Why don't you just lie down a while, Bets," he suggested.

Mrs. Pym strode back into the room. She said, "Now the bathroom

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is just—good heavens, get your feet off the great covers! Did your mother allow you to act like that in her home?"

James swung his feet off the bed. "I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't know."

"Didn't *know*? The bathroom's down the hall and around the corner. It says 'Guest' on it. Mind your manners." She left again.

James and Betsy shed their shoes and went to sleep in their respective beds like chastened children.

James awoke to pitch darkness and the soft sound of bleating sheep. The curtains were pulled to, but he didn't remember closing them. He went to the window and opened the curtains, but not much light showed through. There seemed to be no moon.

His watch said it was after eight o'clock, and his stomach agreed. He woke up Betsy and they quickly dressed for outside, crept down through the house to the door, then out to the car. The air had turned cold. From all around them came sounds of a barnyard in repose. There was no sign of the Pyms. James had the odd sensation that they were escaping and found himself wishing they actually were pulling up stakes and going somewhere else, that their bags were in the car.

They drove to the Black Anvil. Inside, the room was low and mean, and it turned quiet for a moment as they made their way to the bar. The floor was dirty, and there were only a few long tables to eat at, each of which was occupied. James ordered them shepherd's pie and cider.

A man with long, thinning black hair invited them over to where he sat, and they accepted his offer. He invited Betsy to sit down beside him and waved James across the table.

"Where are you from, then?" he said.

"New York," said James.

"Well done," the man said. "I'm from west of here myself. Ever heard of Manchester?"

They had. The man wanted to know what sights they'd seen and told them which he thought were worth seeing. The shepherd's pie was good and Betsy and James both ate a second helping.

"Where are you staying then, love?" the man asked Betsy.

"At Mrs. Pym's," she said.

Faces looked up from every part of the room.

"You're staying on Pym's farm?"

"Yes," said James. "What of it? She seems like a decent enough

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woman, if a bit tough." He regretted saying it as soon as it was out of his mouth. Any one of these people might be her best friend. Any one of them might be Pym himself.

"Would that she were tougher," said the man after the others had gone back, at least for appearances, to minding their own business. "That husband of hers might be her death. —Or then again," he added, "she might be his."

"What do you mean?" said Betsy.

"I mean," said the man, "that Pym is a sot, and a nasty sot at that."

"Does he hit her?" said Betsy.

"And she hits back, of course," said the man for an answer, "though she can't hit as hard as he can, if you know what I mean."

"Why doesn't anyone do anything about it?" James asked.

"What would you do?" said the man.

"I'd stop him. You'd have to stop him."

"Not *me*. The only way to stop Pym would be dead in his tracks. Why would I want to get myself tangled up in that? Besides, it's always seemed she could take care of herself."

There were some scattered, stifled snorts of laughter throughout the room. James didn't say anything right away. He was thinking about Mrs. Pym, her sundress half torn from her majestic frame, being burrowed through the mud beneath the force of Pym, one massive knot of muscle and fury.

"You have to help someone who needs your help," said James.

"A valiant attitude," said the man. "But not always true. And you'd do well to remember that. I'm telling you, there are some things that can only be stopped if they're wiped out."

The ride back was treacherous and negotiated in silence. The rutted path seemed more than ever to be something fearsome, like the path through a parted ocean about to collapse. The Pym house was as quiet as it had been earlier. The front door remained unlocked.

James awoke much later to the sharp reports of what sounded at first like gunfire, but which he soon identified to be doors slamming somewhere at a far end of the house. He couldn't hear Betsy's steady breathing. He whispered her name.

"Can you hear it?" she said.

James's pulse quickened. "Hear what?" he said.

"They're fighting."

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As they listened, they heard a short shriek, then a slam, then a slap and, quickly, another slam. A door banged open, then slammed again. And then there was only the soft burp of the cows and goats near the house, and, even softer, a breeze sifting through the branches outside the windows.

James awoke later at the end of a long, harrowing dream, in which he helped Pym to beat up his wife and then killed Pym. He needed to go to the bathroom.

He climbed from bed and hunted for a pair of pants in the pools of black at the foot of the bed. And then a large coarse hand had his wrist, another hand clamped across his face, and he felt himself pulled out into the hallway. One hand stayed across his mouth, but the other now wrapped around his naked torso, the nails digging into the flesh between his ribs. The bare arm across his stomach was cool and damp, and left his skin feeling damp where it had touched him. In his ear, a voice whispered, "I need your help." It was Mrs. Pym's voice. Her hold was as cool and firm as iron.

"What do you need me to do?" he said softly, through her fingers.

"Right," she said, releasing her hold on him. "Come with me."

James followed her down the stairs, the soles of his feet aching as they touched the cold stone of the first floor. In the dim light, he could see Mrs. Pym was wearing a nightdress and her hair was gathered in a knot at the back of her head. Her feet were also bare, though she might have been walking on warm sand for how little the cold seemed to bother her. She led James through the back of the house and out into a small hothouse.

The ground turned to damp dirt beneath their feet, and then to mud, sticky and half dried. A weak sliver of moon hung in the sky above the plexiglass slats in the ceiling.

"Take one end." Mrs. Pym stooped and tugged on one end of a bulky sack underneath a table lined with potted plants.

"What is that?" James said. "Can't we do it in the morning?"

"The difficult thing about morning," she said, "is that people are awake, and it's light enough to see things." She began dragging the sack, with great effort, out from beneath the table. He crouched to help her.

"It's a great bag, isn't it?" she said. "Handles and all. I was lucky to have one around. Carried peat originally."

"What does it carry now?" James ventured, hoisting the sack and finding it couldn't be done delicately.

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"Mr. Pym," she said, and struck off with her end.

James dropped his end. "Mr. Pym?"

"Right. And he's going to come to if you don't hurry."

"He's not dead, then."

"Not yet, no," she said. "We'll need to bury him for that."

James wanted to run away. He knew this could all be a dream—he'd already killed Pym once tonight. The man in the Black Anvil had probably brought it on with his talk of the Pyms and the only way to stop Pym's violence.

"Was he beating you?" asked James.

Mrs. Pym had put down her end of the sack. "Do you need to see?"

"No," he said. "No, I believe you."

"I knocked him cold. I pretended to be unconscious, and when he walked away I came after him with the garden spade. I gave him a tap, all right." She reasserted her hold on the sack and looked at James. He felt much the same way he'd felt on the rutted roads that led back to the farm: the moment did not swell with options. He grimly heaved his weight of the load and they marched from the sodden hothouse out into the night.

She had a spot picked out near a copse of trees. The earth there was particularly cold, yet it was soft and loamy. They put down their burden and took up tools she had set up there. The ground was yielding, as if it had been turned before. That was English farmland for you, thought James.

"Won't they find your husband if we leave him here?" he said. The unreality of the question struck him with its full force. "Mrs. Pym, I can't do this."

"James—do you mind if I call you James?"

"No," he said impatiently.

"James, I can't do this alone. I was fortunate that you were here. Don't desert me now."

James couldn't believe this woman was as vulnerable as she was making herself appear. And yet he hadn't dreamed the noises of their fight. For the first time, he smelled the acrid bite of the rye whiskey rising from the sack. As sordid as the scene was, there was something valiant in ending her persecution. He kept digging.

By the time the hole was finished, they were both caked with dirt. James could taste it on his lips, and felt it crumbling in his ears and in the folds of his eyelids. He was drenched with sweat. Mrs. Pym was as brown as a Mediterranean. They crawled out of the hole

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and hauled the sack in. It was much colder outside the hole. James heard no sound within the sack, felt no movement. It seemed entirely possible that Mrs. Pym's blow with the spade had been all that was required.

They filled the hole up, and had a large mound atop the plot when all the dirt had been used. Mrs. Pym sat on the mound, then rolled on it, flattening the soil. James tamped it with the spade, then rolled on it himself, stamped on it with his feet. As much as anything, he was trying to keep warm. "I need a shower," he said.

"There are no showers," she said. "Only baths, and the pipes are loud. You'll wake your wife."

"I'm not afraid to wake my wife."

"She'll be happy to see this scene, then, I'm sure."

"It can be explained."

"You on your honeymoon, in your drawers, with me in my shift, and both of us covered head to toe with mud? And how will she bear up when you tell her we just murdered my husband?"

"I didn't. You did."

"He wasn't dead until he took his last breath."

"He wasn't breathing in that bag."

"He was when I put him in."

"I need to get cleaned up," he said.

"We'll go to the pond," she told him, and she struck out into the darkness. James reluctantly followed her to an oblong pool, a miniature lake.

James could see her muscles ripple as she pulled off her nightdress at the edge of the pond and stooped to rinse it clean. On her back and on her thighs he also saw the bruises, the scars. She hung the dress on a branch and swam out into the water. "It's very cold," she said. "Make sure to keep moving."

He took off his shorts and rinsed them, then swam out after her.

"Do you like being married, James?" she said.

"Very much."

She seemed to think about it for a while, as if deciding whether to believe him or not. Then she swam back to shore and quickly put on her nightdress. When he joined her and put on his "drawers," she led him back to the house, gave him a towel and some hot tea, and sent him to bed.

The morning sun left James cowering in bed as if from a searchlight. Betsy coaxed him out with promises of what they would see

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that day. James had seen all he wanted to see for a while, but he dutifully crawled forth.

"What happened to your nails?" said Betsy. James looked. There was dirt caked under each fingernail, each toenail—ugly enough to be all the indictment, all the reality he needed. He told Betsy what had transpired during the night. She listened, and with each new revelation her face came closer to the glow of pure horror. "You and that woman?" she said. "Last night?"

James nodded. He understood the shock of it.

"With nothing on!"

"You're missing the point. We murdered her husband, Bets."

"How long have we been married?"

"Betsy—" He tried to touch her, but she pulled away and walked to the other side of the room, near the historic stone with *1434* carved in it.

"How long?" she demanded.

"Five days," he said, "today."

"Five days," she said. "Five days! You couldn't even wait a week before you went skinnydipping with that Amazon woman!"

"Wait," said James. "Let's put this in perspective. What's more important—that I had to get clean after burying a man, or that I buried a man before he was dead?"

"Both are totally unacceptable behavior, I can tell you that."

As he formed a reply, Mrs. Pym rapped at the door.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she said. "James, there's a call for you on the phone downstairs."

"Hello?" he said.

"I saw you," said a man's voice.

"What?" said James.

"You and Pym's wife. I saw what you did."

"What did we do?" James felt very near to death.

"I saw you dig a hole and then go swimming. Wasn't it kind of nip for an outing like that?"

"Who is this?"

"You've my word I wouldn't tell you, though what could you do if I did? Call the police?"

"What do you want?"

"New York, you said, eh?"

"It's you!"

"That's a lot of good, isn't it? Who am I, now! There's the real

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stumper. And of course the penalty for not knowing is quite a bit of cash."

"*What* cash?"

"Being from New York, you must know all about cash. I'd say ten thousand quid ought to do nicely."

"You're insane. Our car back home isn't worth half that, and that's all we own. We're newlyweds."

"Congratulations. I'm sure you both come from fine families. Get the money." The line went dead, and James heard the hateful silence in his ear.

He searched the house, then scanned the fields, but he could find no trace of Mrs. Pym. He returned to Betsy and told her the new developments. Some note of urgency in his voice must have convinced her of the gravity of their predicament, because she asked, "What can we do now?"

"There's only one thing we can do," he said. "We have to raise the body and call the police. While she's gone is the perfect time."

"You want *me* to help you?"

"Do you want me to get Mrs. Pym to help?"

She was already changing her clothes.

The sun was hot. James did most of the digging while Betsy stood watch.

He winced when an especially industrious thrust of the shovel pierced through the dirt into the peat bag with a ripping sound. A few, more cautious shovelfuls of dirt revealed the sack itself, a gash through its middle.

Down in the hole, looking inside the bag, James could see he had pierced flesh with that errant thrust. The flesh looked odd, but he didn't doubt that it was the color of dead flesh.

But then he noticed something unaccountable. The flesh seemed not to be flesh at all, but rather a coat or pelt of some sort. He fell upon the sack and ripped it straight across its girth.

"What are you doing?" said Betsy.

"I didn't kill anybody," said James, then saw his suspicions were correct. "This is a big old goat!"

Betsy wouldn't look.

"Look." He felt as if he could fly. "Look!" But she wouldn't look, wouldn't even address him.

He turned to climb out of the hole and a skeet gun's barrel brushed against the side of his face . . .

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"New York you said, eh?"

It was the man from the Black Anvil. Beside him stood Mrs. Pym. She didn't look intolerably happy.

"Introduce me, then, Mrs. Pym," said the man.

"This is Mr. Pym," said Mrs. Pym.

Pym regarded James. "Now let's be a good man and come up real slow, eh?"

James came up real slow.

"Now what if you were to just fill in this little hole here, then."

James took up the spade and began to shovel dirt back on top of the goat. As he did, Pym talked to him.

"It's not right to be digging in other's gardens, messing up their lawns. You're a smart one, aren't you? Mrs. Pym said you were a smart one—a regular knight and gentleman. That's right, a perfect little gentleman you are, except for the little matter of shoes and the wearing of pajamas. Mrs. Pym told me all about that. She has a soft spot for you, you know. Took you an unexpected nip in the pond, but you wouldn't bite at the bait." He grabbed the stem of the spade and held it fast. James looked up at him. "But I hear you wouldn't strike at the bait."

James went back to filling in the hole.

"George, leave them go," said Mrs. Pym.

"Shut up," said Pym.

"Please, George," she said. "I've finished with you and this scheme—I've finished for good with all of it. The police are coming."

He screamed an oath and he took the rifle in both hands by the barrel and swung it at her back. It seemed it would cut her in two, but she fell to the ground still intact, gasping. James brought the spadehead down on Pym's neck. Pym fell at his feet and James took the gun and threw it into the trees. Mrs. Pym crawled over to her husband to see that he wasn't dead. James could see he wasn't—he was already stirring slightly. Mrs. Pym rested his head in her lap. Betsy came and stood close to James.

"I'd tell you not to get married," Mrs. Pym muttered, and at first James thought she was talking nonsense to Pym. Then he noticed her eyes were closed and he realized she might be talking to him.

"I'd tell you not to get married," she said again, "but you seem to know what you're doing." And then she looked up and James saw she was looking at Betsy, not at him. "It was his idea," she told Betsy, indicating her husband, "but it was my fault. I told him it wouldn't work, that you were smart, and that you didn't have the

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money he was taking for granted." James felt something quite like embarrassment as Mrs. Pym talked to Betsy. He had spent a night of mayhem with this woman and felt no closer to her than he did to the goat beneath his feet.

"Honey," James said to Betsy, "you'd better go call the police." Betsy turned toward the house, looking pale. So much for the honeymoon, he thought, wondering how long it would be before they would be back on familiar territory.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

A SURPRISE SOLUTION

by HELEN THILENIUS

He had an IQ of two hundred and two
And felt that his Nobel was long overdue.
He got his main rival well out of the way
By serving him wine of distinctive bouquet—
Due to much lab work, producing a potion
Deliciously fatal, soon ending all motion.

"There's no way the dumb cops will figure it out,"
He said to himself, gaily dancing about.
"They can't track the workings of my brilliant brain"—
Forgetting that crime put him on *their* terrain.
He was practicing Zen on his verandah
When the dumb cops showed up and read the Miranda.

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In her cover letter with "The Move," Deborah Hillyard Clayton wrote: "I once spent a lonely summer on the seashore in Maine. My memories of the wild beauty of that place have always affected me strongly, and after ten years I have finally incorporated them into a story.

"I've only recently begun trying my hand at writing. Most of the time it's all I can do to keep up with my three active children, as well as giving guitar and piano lessons. With the Boy Scouts and the Brownies, the swimming lessons and the baseball, sometimes it seems as if my main activity is chauffering."

If our detection serves, our guess is that at least one of Deborah Hillyard Clayton's children is a girl and at least one is a boy, that unlike her heroine she is happily married and (we hope) has a driver's license. And even if we didn't know it for fact, we'd have suspected she lives in Colorado, another beautiful state . . .

THE MOVE

by DEBORAH HILLYARD CLAYTON

May 7

We have found a house in the most beautiful spot you could imagine—right on the coast of Maine (or "Down-East Maine," as they call it).

The house sits on the top of a hill, with wild blueberry fields surrounding it on three sides and a green forest nearby. The hill drops steeply behind the house, and crashing down below at the bottom of the hill is the ocean, cold and grey. We even have our own private beach, although I'm still looking for the sand—mostly it's big black rocks, with an acre of seaweed when the tide is out.

The house has one problem, though, that just scares me to death. Most of our access to the beach is down a gentle sloping path, but

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there's one place near the edge of the forest where there's a sheer drop, with sharp rocks below. I have to keep a very close watch on Jeffey. I'm wondering if there's some kind of fence Ken could rig up to make it safer.

I've always wanted to live by the ocean, but already I miss Colorado's mountains and cities, and, most of all, my parents. I feel so guilty at leaving them when they depended upon me to help them out. But I know that even they wouldn't have encouraged me to refuse to go with my husband.

Jeffey had a wonderful time on the plane. Luckily the woman who sat in front of us was very patient with him, even when he kept kissing her hair. I managed to keep him entertained with lunch, a few picture books I'd brought along, and the intricacies of the fold-down tray on the back of the seat, but it wasn't exactly a restful flight.

May 10

Ken has been so wrapped up in his new job that he hasn't had much time for Jeffey or me. About the only time he's spent with Jeffey lately was yesterday, when I was hanging the kitchen curtains. I glanced out of the open window, breathing in the exhilarating sea air, and noticed that they were exploring together off near the woods. The next time I looked out, I was horrified to see them standing near the edge of the cliff, throwing rocks off the edge. I dropped the curtains in the sink and rushed out and across the field to where they were. Ken seemed embarrassed to see me, but Jeffey was glowing with pride, saying, "See? See?"

Ken was telling him that the rocks were bombs, and that they went "boom" when they hit the rocks below. He helped Jeffey with his aim, showing him how to throw hard. I was pleased to see some father-son interaction going on, but I hated their being so close to that dangerous cliff and managed to tempt them back to the house for a snack.

May 16

Our furniture finally came. Jeffey was ecstatic to see his high-chair, and sat in it for a long time. I felt almost the same way about the television set when they carried it in, but something seems to be wrong with it—either it was broken in the move or we're too remote to pick up anything.

With Ken working nights, it gets very lonely out here. Our nearest

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neighbors aren't within walking distance and I've never felt confident enough to learn to drive. The only sounds in the evening are the swish of the ocean and sometimes the faint, sad whistle of the wind. I listen to the radio at night for company, but all I can really pick up is a country station, a couple of religious all-purpose stations, and one Canadian station—in French. But Jeffey keeps me company. He actually said a sentence last night: "Bomb go boom!" He's been throwing his toys around the house, and I'm starting to realize that there were advantages to living in a bare house.

June 2

At home it would be warm by now, but here you still need a jacket to go outside. A woman at the grocery store in town says there are only two seasons in Maine—winter and July.

Every day I bundle Jeffey up and we walk down to the beach and watch the ocean for a while. I love the place where the sea and the sky melt together in a grey haze of mist, and imagine that I'm looking straight out toward Europe. Jeffey's favorite game is picking up stones and hurling them into the waves, shouting, "Bomb go boom!" His aim is getting to be surprisingly good—he's managed to hit a big grey rock that juts out of the seaweed at low tide quite a few times already.

Ken working nights is really disappointing for me. Now he says he probably won't be transferred to the day shift until he's here at least six months. Our only meal together is dinner—only for him it's breakfast.

June 5

I'm getting starved for the sight of people. Yesterday I saw a lobster boat far out offshore and I got out the binoculars and tried to make out the men on it, hauling up crates and tossing them into the sea again. On shopping days, I'd like to stop and chat with the grocery clerks and the villagers, but Ken is always impatient to come home and get some sleep.

He has gotten very irritable about Jeffey's noise during the day when he is trying to sleep. This house is basically only one room, so the only refuge I can find is to take Jeffey outside, away from the house. We've been exploring the forest—so green and beautiful, with huge green ferns nestled everywhere. It's easy not to get lost because the sea is always murmuring softly to the east. We walk along the shore, too, wearing sturdy shoes for rock-climbing.

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The seaweed looks terrible—greenish-brown, with big, strange-looking bulbs, sprawling across the rocks, steaming in the sun. The gulls circle constantly, crying over the sound of the waves.

June 11

Jeffey is into a throwing stage and it's driving me crazy. Last night he threw a tube of toothpaste—and it wouldn't be so bad, but he threw it right at *me*. One sharp corner caught me near the corner of my eye, ripping a little gash in my skin. As I held it, he looked at me and said tentatively, "Bomb go boom?" Unfortunately, it feels much worse than it looks, so I'm not getting much sympathy from Ken.

But Ken has calmed down a little and actually took Jeffey for a walk yesterday. This gave me an hour or two to myself. I played my guitar a little and wrote in my journal.

June 19

Things are not going well. Ken is so distant, unwilling to talk to me at all. If I didn't have Jeffey for company, I think I'd die of loneliness. This morning I waited and waited for Ken to come home after work, but he didn't show up. Finally, I started to get worried, since it's quite a drive over winding, rolling roads from town, so I broke down and called his work. They told me he'd left at his usual time.

Four hours later, he drove in. I was so relieved to see him I ran up and hugged him, but he shrugged me off. He snapped at me when I questioned him and marched off to bed without an explanation.

It's so isolated here—I wish I could drive, so I could get out sometimes on my own. I miss Colorado so much, and my parents—I feel awful when I think of my parents. It must be worse for them—almost as if I'd died. Because life for them goes on just like before, only without me. For me, everything is changed. But there is a void in my life.

June 30

Last night after dark I happened to take out the trash and a flash of silver light caught my eye. I looked around and saw sparkles of light all around—on the ground, in the bushes. They were fireflies! So beautiful! I'd read of them, but never seen them. I ran and got Jeffey and turned out all the house lights, then I sat on the steps,

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holding him in my lap, staring at the fireflies until he fell asleep in my arms.

I'm so worried about Ken—I can't imagine what could have caused his personality change. He doesn't come home for hours after he gets off work, and sometimes I notice he's been drinking. Maybe the pressure of this new job in this new place has been too much for him. I must try harder to keep Jeffey out of his way. This morning Ken pushed him aside so roughly he fell down and cried—poor baby, he doesn't understand why his daddy isn't nice to him any more. And I don't either!

July 2

Jeffey turned two years old today. He helped me bake a cake and got all gooey licking the beaters, but we both loved every minute of it. Then when Ken got up, he said he was taking us out to dinner for a celebration.

It was wonderful being out and seeing other people. And I had my first lobster, so I guess I'm a real Mainer now. Except to be honest, I didn't like it. Pick, pick, pick, and not one real mouthful—just tiny shreds, barely enough to taste.

Ken seemed very abstracted during dinner and kept looking around almost secretively. The green stuff inside the lobster had an interesting flavor but looked too weird to eat and enjoy. Jeffey and I finally gave up and had a good time pinching each other with the claws—a meal that expensive should at least have some fun in it!

July 11

Our fields have blossomed with thousands of white daisies, sparkling in the sun. It's warm enough to wear a bathing suit on the beach now, although Jeffey refuses to wear anything at all. He sits in little puddles and digs with a shovel, probably disturbing dozens of horrible microscopic creatures. I play my guitar, but the water is still too cold for me.

Ken hardly looks at Jeffey or me any more. He sleeps, eats, and then leaves, not returning for hours. When I try to talk to him, he turns his back. More and more often I smell liquor on his breath when he comes roaring in sometime in the afternoon, only to sleep for a few hours and then drag himself angrily off to work. Jeffey and I just try to keep out of his way as much as we can. I wish with all my heart that we'd stayed in Colorado.

Jeffey is still throwing rocks out to sea every day. I have a fantasy

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that eventually he'll clear all the rocks off the beach and that underneath will be soft, velvety sand to lie on. But I suspect that the waves roll the rocks back in as fast as he pitches them out.

July 15

We had a thunderstorm in the night—very close lightning and heavy thunder, muffled and strange in the thick fog. I was convinced the house was going to be hit—right on the sea, it's the highest thing around. I held tight to Jeffey, who slept soundly through the whole storm without a whimper.

July 22

Something terrible happened this morning. Jeffey and I were out looking for blueberries when Ken came driving down the path we call a driveway, home from work. He seemed to accelerate straight toward us! I managed to scoop up Jeffey and leap out of the way just as the car brushed by us. Ken said later that the brakes failed, but I'm terrified. I wish I knew enough about cars to test the brakes while he's asleep.

July 27

He broke my guitar today! Jeffey and I were sitting on the porch in the late-afternoon sun while he slept inside. I was strumming a slow song, thinking of happier days, when suddenly the door burst open and he stomped out in a rage.

"A man can't sleep in his own house!" he bellowed—and he snatched up my beautiful Martin D-28 with its smoothly polished rosewood and slammed it against the house, breaking it into jagged shards of wood. I screamed and cried and Jeffey buried his face in my legs, but he just threw down the ruined thing and slammed back into the house again.

August 5

Jeffey and I were outside this afternoon when Ken's car crested the hill, speeding toward us again. I snatched Jeffey's hand and ran toward the forest. We were almost there when I turned to see the car was almost upon us, and I froze. But Jeffey was clutching a big rock—big for him, anyway. His little arm reached back, back—and he hurled the stone directly at the car. I could see Ken's face through the windshield, purple with rage, eyes slitted with concentration, when the rock hit the windshield. Sunburst cracks appeared as the

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rock bounced off. The car swerved, poised on the edge of the cliff for a moment, and then plunged down toward the sea. It hit the rocks below with a sickening crash, followed by a deafening explosion. "Bomb go boom!" said Jeffey.

August 6

We are moving back to Colorado.

DETECTIVERSE

STRESS REDUCTION

by SARI BITTICKS

My life used to be a mess—
I was a pitiful victim of stress.
I bought a book and got terrific advice:
Make a stress list and check it twice,
Put down everything that stresses you—
Eliminate each item is what you do.
So I listed the sources of the stress I hate—
I listed my boss, my dentist, my mate.
I got some arsenic and mixed it with spice—
That stress-reduction book was worth the price!

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

However much we prize the stories in our Department of First Stories—and we know that you do, too, because you've told us so—we prize the stories in our Department of Seconds even more, representing as they do an even more serious overture into the professional world of storytelling.

Terry Mullins' first story, "A Rabbit or a Skunk?," appeared in the November issue. This top-quality follow-through is heartening, both because of the speed with which it arrived and because of its exceptional storyline . . .

THE POLICEMAN

by TERRY MULLINS

Benji was talking a mile a minute, telling what happened on a television talk show the night before. And half the gang were helping him tell it since they had seen the same show. Then the policeman walked up to them and everyone shut up. He held out his hand and they smiled and gave him five because they knew he expected it and because he was black, too.

"Do you guys like to play basketball?" he asked.

Rumble said, "Sure. We was just talking about basketball when you walked up." And everybody laughed.

Peet, who was tall and fast but who couldn't think up quick answers, said, "We play at school sometimes."

"Peet plays," said Rumble, "'cause he can almost slam dunk, but the rest of us just get a chance to shoot from the line a few times."

"Well, how would you like to turn the lot next to the Atlantic station into a place where you could practice?"

"That lot stinks," said Rumble, "and there's broken beer and wine bottles all over the place."

Nickel, who was not as tall as Peet but who loved basketball, added sadly, "And the station parks cars there sometimes."

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"We can keep the cars off the lot," said the policeman, "and we can get you a backboard and hoop if you guys will clean up the lot."

They were not overjoyed. "Where could we put the junk?" asked Nickel finally.

"You tell me when you want to start cleaning and I'll have a dumpster there. You throw the trash in and we'll haul it away."

"We'll think about it and let you know," Rumble said.

The policeman held out his hand and they gave him five and he walked away. Rumble let him get out of sight and then asked, "What do you think?"

"Maybe," said Nickel. "It might be cool."

"I ain't gonna clean up that stinkin' lot," said Malcolm, " 'cause we clean it up and they take it and use it for somethin' else. They just want to make us do the work. They's already got us lookin' in on Sister Oolah and Katy Jones."

That decided Rumble. Katy Jones was his grandmother's sister and the Rumblers checked her and Oolah out each day because they were old and lived alone. Besides, Rumble didn't go along with any of Malcolm's ideas anyway. "Let's give a look," he said.

They walked over to the lot and looked at it. It was a mess. They walked onto it warily. Nickel picked up a wine bottle to throw at rats if they saw any. The lot smelled of urine and beer and long-dead cats. Weeds were trying to grow. The pile of tires near the Atlantic station held stale water and something foul that attracted large flies which swarmed up when Rumble kicked one of the tires. Nickel wanted to say something hopeful but couldn't think of anything hopeful to say. Malcolm said, "I'll bet there's a corpse under those tires."

"You scared of a corpse?" asked Rumble.

"Nah."

"If we found a corpse, we'd get on television," said Benji. They left, talking about whose corpse it would be and what they would say to the TV crew. Then they broke up.

Nickel walked around a bit and then went back and looked at the lot for a long time. As it grew dark, the lot looked spooky. Finally, he went home. Aunt Pern was talking with his mother and older sister and was ironing brassieres. Nickel hurried to his room. He hated it when Pern ironed underclothes and they all talked so loud. His younger brother Martin was sitting on the bed listening to the radio. He turned it off when Nickel came in. "Where you been?" he asked.

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"Just hanging around."

"Can I come with you someday?"

"You're too young. The guys don't want anyone from junior high hanging around with us."

"How were the old women?"

"Okay."

"What would you do if one of them was dead?"

"We'd tell the policeman."

"Would you go right into the police station?"

"Nah. We'd just tell him."

Nickel turned the radio back on. He didn't want to talk about the old women. The policeman had asked the Rumblers to look in on them and had given them a special number to call if they found anything wrong. The Rumblers kept the number secret. They didn't even tell anyone they had a number. And they were always hoping that they would find one of the women unconscious or hurt so they could call the policeman, but in the five months since he had asked them to look in, the women had stayed healthy. Nickel didn't tell Martin about the basketball court. They probably wouldn't do it.

But the policeman had picked his time well. The high-school basketball championship started the next week. Then the community-college team was mentioned as having a good chance to play in the N.I.T. So Rumble wanted a place to play basketball and the Rumblers told the policeman to have his dumpster on the lot Wednesday afternoon. He did and he gave them gloves and they got to work. It took nearly three afternoons to clean the lot. Saturday, the policeman and three of his white friends looked over the lot, pulled up a few weeds, and set up the backboard and hoop. They shot a few hoops themselves and then left the basketball for the Rumblers—who wore themselves out with it the rest of the day.

For the next month they spent most of their free time dribbling, passing, and shooting. They weren't a team and they wouldn't have had anyone to play against if they had called themselves a team. But they had fun. At first they were afraid the policeman would want to coach them, but he left them pretty much alone.

Then Big Ed started watching them play. Big Ed was a drug dealer. The third day, he just sat there in his long black car watching them for a full half hour. They knew what was coming. The Rumblers quit playing early and Nickel went right home to help Martin with his homework. Since Martin didn't do homework and neither did

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Nickel, they just played the radio and guessed what the women were cooking for supper. It was easy to guess because you really can't miss collards.

The next day at school, Rumble said that Big Ed had stopped him on the way home. He wanted to talk with them. He'd be at the lot at five-thirty. They didn't play much basketball that afternoon. Big Ed showed up on time. He got out of the car and they got a good look at the diamond in his ear, his diamond rings, and a diamond stuck in his tie. His driver kept the motor running.

"You kids are wasting your time playing in this dirty old lot," he said. "You could be making money working for me. I mean big money, maybe a hundred dollars a day. Would you like a hundred dollars a day?"

They caught their breath and said sure. That would be cool.

"But if you work for me, you don't have nothing to do with the police, understand?"

They understood.

"Now I know you go to some old women's houses and tell the police if they're all right. That's got to stop. You stay away from cops. If a cop comes here to talk with you while you play basketball, you quit playing basketball. Understand?"

They understood.

"And I'll be watching for a week or two before you start work. If you have anything to do with the cops, it will be bad for you, and maybe for your families, too. Understand?"

They understood. Big Ed got into his car and left.

"What'll we do?" asked Benji.

"We've got to work out a system," said Rumble. He thought about it. "All right. Tomorrow half of us will be at Seventh and Queen and the other half will be at Sixth and Queen. Benji will look in on Sister Oolah. We'll be on the lookout for Big Ed. If we see his car, we whistle and Benji ducks for cover. We do the same thing for Mrs. Jones, half of us at Sixth and Ohio and the other half at Fifth and Ohio. If anything's wrong with them, we call the policeman. If not, we just keep out of his way. And if we see him coming when we're playing basketball, we quit."

The system worked. Big Ed's car cruised through the neighborhood a few times in the next two weeks, but he never saw anything he didn't like.

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Then, on a Friday morning, Rumble told the Rumblers that Big Ed wanted to put them on his payroll. They were to meet him at the basketball lot at five-thirty. They'd soon be making big money. He'd said they all better be there.

During lunch, Nickel just sat and thought. What would he do with all that money? He couldn't buy anything with it. Aunt Pern would want to know where it came from. He couldn't let his family see that he had all that money. He thought of hiding it in a flashlight, but Martin stayed in the room all the time. If he tried to use the flashlight and it didn't work, he'd take it apart and find the money. Pillows, the mattress, books, even the old lunchbox—none of those things would be safe from Martin. He thought about giving it to the church, but Aunt Pern sat at the end of the pew and passed the plate to him each Sunday and she always looked to see what he put in. Then he passed it to Martin and looked to see what he put in. And then Martin passed it to their mother or their sister, whichever sat next. So that wouldn't do. Finally he saw the answer. He'd buy lottery tickets. He probably wouldn't win anything, but at least he could get rid of the money. And if he did win, he could say he'd just bought one ticket and hit.

With the money problem solved, Nickel had to face his real worry. None of them really wanted to push drugs, but they were afraid of Big Ed. The man was dangerous. He would as soon kill a person as not. So they had to push drugs because of Big Ed. Nickel thought of Peet's cousin who went to prison because they found just a little bit of heroin on him. He was out now and he swore he was never going back—he'd die first.

After lunch, Nickel had library. He got there early and found Langston Hughes' *The Panther and the Lash,* which the policeman had said he should read. He took the book to a table close to the librarian. He opened the book and saw that it was poetry, so he just turned the pages very slowly without reading. In about ten minutes, the librarian had finished writing the names of all those present and asked if someone would take the names to the principal. Nickel jumped up and said that he would go.

"Thank you, Nicholas," she said, somewhat surprised. "Go straight there and come straight back."

"Yes'um."

Nickel walked down the hall and into the principal's outer room, with chairs lining the wall. It was empty. The door to the secretary's room was open, so he went in. It was empty, too.

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The door to the principal's office was closed and he could hear the principal dictating. Nickel looked to make sure no one had come into the waiting room, then he went over to the secretary's phone, pushed the button for an outside line, and punched out the secret number. It buzzed twice and then a woman told him he had reached the local police station.

Nickel cupped his hand over the phone and said, "This is one of the Rumblers. Big Ed wants us to sell dope for him. We don't want to, but we're scared not to. He's meeting us at five-thirty at the basketball lot next to the Atlantic station." He hung up quickly. Then he went over to the principal's door and knocked. The secretary opened it and he gave her the list of names. He didn't start trembling until he was back out in the hall. He stopped for a drink of water and felt better.

After school, the Rumblers met at the basketball lot. They alternated between talking about Big Ed and shooting baskets. They tried to be upbeat.

"A hundred dollars a day!"

"Yeh, a day. That's what he said."

"I'll bet he's a millionaire. Did you see that diamond in his ear?"

At one point, when they were not shooting and not talking, Peet said, "What if we get caught?"

No one said anything. Peet continued, "They could put us in jail like they did my cousin." Still no one said anything. Peet sank three or four baskets, then quit and sat on the basketball.

"We'll see that we don't get caught," said Rumble. "And we'll be making a hundred dollars a day. We'll be able to buy anything we want."

Eventually it was five-thirty. Everyone just sat and looked for Big Ed's long black car. And just when they were hoping he wouldn't show up, the car came down Roberts Street and pulled up beside the Men's Room at the side of the Atlantic station, where people in the station couldn't see anything. This time there were two men with Big Ed.

The driver got out on one side and the new man got out on the other and opened the door for Big Ed. All three were wearing suits and their jackets were open so the Rumblers could see they were wearing pistols in shoulder holsters. Big Ed stood beside the car and called the Rumblers over.

"This is a trial run," he said. "I'm giving each of you a bag with

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twenty packets of cocaine. You sell them for five dollars each. Get the money before you hand over the packet. When you meet me back here at ten-thirty, you'll have a hundred dollars each. You give me half and you keep the rest. Any questions?"

"What if we can't sell them all?"

"You sell them. You have my money for me at ten-thirty or you'll be in big trouble." He reached into the car, brought out a plastic bag, and gave it to Rumble. "Learn how to handle the bag so you don't spill it. You want to have just one packet in your hand at a time—"

And suddenly from Roberts Street, two police cars sped up and stopped behind Big Ed's car with a squeal of tires. The policeman and three white cops jumped out with pistols aimed at Big Ed. Rumble threw the plastic bag under Big Ed's car. Two more police cars came up Ninth Street and four more cops got out. They made the three dealers put their hands on the car while they took their guns, then they handcuffed them.

Big Ed began cursing, but a white cop hit him in the ribs with the butt of his gun and he quit. The policeman reached under Big Ed's car and got the plastic bag. As they were herding the prisoners into the police cars, Big Ed said, "The *kid* had that bag. *He* threw it under the car."

The white cops looked at the policeman, who laughed and said, "Sure he did. And you bought all that stuff in your car from him thinking it was Alka Seltzer, for your indigestion."

They took the prisoners and the car away and left the Rumblers standing alone in the lot.

"They didn't even draw their guns," said Benji. "I thought they were going to shoot it out with the cops and a lot of us would get killed."

"He saw me," said Rumble. "The policeman looked right at me when I threw the bag under the car."

"How did they know Big Ed was here?" asked Malcolm.

Nickel was quiet.

"They came right when Big Ed was handing out the stuff. How'd they know what was goin' on?" Malcolm wanted to know.

"They watched him, of course," said Benji. "Just like on TV. They been watching Big Ed for days, maybe weeks. You know, like that TV show where they tapped the guy's phone and heard everything he was planning."

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"Yeh," said Rumble. "I saw that, too. They bugged his room and tapped his phone, and they had this listening thing they aimed at the guy when he was sitting with the spy on a park bench and they heard him promise to sell the plans for the atom bomb."

And it all became a rerun of the television show for everyone except Nickel.

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another distinguished ghost story by

ROBERTSON DAVIES

When Robertson Davies was Master of Massey College at the University of Toronto, he was expected to contribute to the entertainment at the annual Christmas party, and for eighteen years he wrote and told a ghost story. This is the third year EQMM has reprinted one of them—this one our particular favorite. It is a delightful concept, full of charming surprise. You will love reading it . . .

EINSTEIN AND THE LITTLE LORD

by ROBERTSON DAVIES

I know you will understand when I say it is a great source of satisfaction to me that this College is regularly and extensively haunted. Every part of our great University strives for distinction of one kind or another, but it is everywhere admitted that in the regularity and variety of our ghostly visitations Massey College stands alone. Year after year, our ghosts never fail us, and they are shades of unquestionable intellectual distinction, the Cream of the Ectoplasm; in this College, so often accused of elitism, our ghosts at least may truly be called the elite of *Who Was Who*. It is hard not to fall prey to sinful pride when I think of them.

Early in January, every year, I begin wondering: Who will it be? Ghosts of worldwide renown think it worth their while to drop in on us for an hour or two, which, in the course of a busy afterlife, is uncommonly civil of them. As the custom has arisen of celebrating centenaries and anniversaries of all sorts, and lists of these events

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are published at the beginning of each year, I look down these columns with an interest that comes close to gloating, wondering who our next unearthly visitant will be. Last January there was one prize I coveted above all. This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Albert Einstein.

I see in your faces wonder, tempered with disdain. What does *he* think he would have to say to Einstein? That is the question I read in your eyes. Ah, but you see, my experience with ghosts has taught me that it is unnecessary to talk to *them;* their concern is to talk to *you.* They have no time for chit-chat. It is true I had some misgiving. If Einstein were to entrust me with post-mortem reflections on the Michelson-Morley experiments, or use me as a means of telling the world a few new things about the wavelength of light emitted by atoms, I should have to be careful not to make any mistakes in taking dictation. But on the whole I was confident. Only let Einstein come: I would find a way of coping with him.

But he didn't come. I waited; I waited. By the beginning of December I began to grow anxious. Had ridiculous pride led me into absurd expectation? Had the other world decided to humble me, to condemn the College to a ghostless year? Of course, I thought, it is not to me but to the College that the mighty specters come, and the College has in no way offended. So I waited as well as I could for one long December week, and just a week ago tonight my vigil was rewarded. Einstein came.

He came unexpectedly, as they always do. It was the night of our Christmas Dance, and as some of you know, that is an affair that not merely raises the roof but rouses the dead. I had stepped out into the quadrangle to rest my ears; nevertheless, the music was still very loud and I was not surprised to hear a quiet, slightly foreign voice say from behind me, "Not quite my sort of thing."

I turned and there he was, impossible to mistake. The stout, unremarkable figure, the lamentable clothes, and the large, splendid, melancholy head. He was smoking a pipe, slowly as a good pipe-smoker does, emitting tiny puffs of fragrance with audible poppings of the lips.

"You have come!" I said.

"Oh, I always meant to come," said he, "but I left you till near the end of my centennial year, when I knew I should be tired. Because of your rules, you know."

What rules, I wondered? But not for long. He meant our rules about College guests. Our unbreakable rule is that no guest may be

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asked for a favor, and that any informal opinions expressed by a guest must be regarded as confidential. Einstein had come to us to escape the publicity that pursues an eminent ghost.

He wanted a rest, and I knew what sort of rest he had in mind. Underneath his arm was a violin. He jerked his head toward the sound of music from the dance, and in a friendly fashion he said, "Come on. We can do better than that."

Quite how I followed him I do not remember, but in no time I was in the large room in the basement of my house, where the piano lives. I say it lives there, because I dare not say I keep it there. I am somewhat in awe of it. You see, I have played the piano all my life, without ever having gained any proficiency whatever. Untold gold was spent on my musical education, but I remain a hopeless fumbler. I am perhaps the only man in musical history to play the piano with a stammer. Nevertheless, I play. Almost every day I approach the piano in my basement and endure its Teutonic sneers as I tinkle out the kind of music I like, which I confess is chiefly piano arrangements of music meant for other instruments, and even for the human voice.

Einstein gestured me toward the piano and began to tune his violin. It was obvious that his pitch was perfect. I was horrified.

"Do you mean you want me to accompany you?" I said, weak with fear.

"No, no, we play together," he said, and tucked the fiddle under his chin.

My blood ran cold. In all the vast repertoire of music in which the violin and piano can mingle there is only one piece that I would dare attempt. It is a "Humoresque" by Dvorak—the Number 7 in G flat. You know it. Popular musical taste has accorded words to it, words selected from a well known railway notice:

"Passengers will please refrain
From flushing toilets when the train
Is standing in the station:
I love you."

But when Einstein speaks, who am I to disobey? So I sat at the piano, and to my astonishment I saw on the music desk before my eyes the score of Bach's Six Sonatas for Clavier and Violin. Einstein made a slight dip with his bow as a signal, my hands flew to the keyboard, and there followed such a flood of exquisite music as had never come out of that piano in its existence. And it was I who was making this glorious sound! Einstein was a pretty good violinist

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—extremely good for a physicist—but I was a musical marvel. Little by little, I took possession of this totally unaccustomed skill. Pride surged through me. I began to refine upon my playing, and to do things properly which Glenn Gould would probably have foozled. I was like a man transformed, endowed with the power to play music as I had imagined it.

Then it happened. There was a sudden discord in the bass end of the piano, and I saw that a gigantic dog had brought its great head down on the keyboard with a crash. Einstein stopped; I stopped; the dog regarded us both with eyes rimmed by nasty wet red flesh.

"I'm sorry if Dougal has interrupted your music," said a high, sweet, clear voice, "but I really must speak to Professor Einstein without delay."

The speaker was the most beautiful boy I have ever seen in my life. His graceful childish figure was dressed in a black-velvet suit and close-fitting knee-breeches from which emerged legs, clothed in black-silk stockings, that Marlene Dietrich might have envied. The velvet suit had a white collar of exquisite lace, and about the handsome manly little face clustered lovelocks of long fair hair falling in a profusion of curls.

You know who it was, of course. And I, from recollections of my childhood reading of the novel of which he was the hero, was able to greet him with a cry which surely fell in familiar and welcome cadence on his ears.

"God bless your lordship! God bless your pretty face! Good luck and happiness to your lordship! Welcome to you!"

The child bowed in response to my greeting.

It was Little Lord Fauntleroy.

Modern children do not seem to know his name, or the book by Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett in which his story is told. But surely this is a temporary lapse of fame; his romance is undying, a superb realization of what Dr. Jung of Zurich has named the Archetype of the Miraculous Child.

Most of you are familiar with him, though there may be one or two among you, under thirty, to whom he is a stranger. But millions of readers, old and young, have thrilled to the tale of little Cedric Errol, born in New York of an American mother—whom he never addressed or referred to except as "Dearest" because that is what his English father, who had died so young, had always called her. Cedric considered himself to be an American, and indeed he exhibited all the American characteristics, total candor, boundless self-

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confidence, naturally fine manners, and a democratic spirit almost too zealous to be wholly believable.

But certainly in Cedric there was nothing affected about this democracy; his dearest friends were Mr. Hobbs the grocery man, Dick the shoeshine boy, and the poor old woman who sold apples at the street corner. He did good to many others among the poor and needy, for whom his tender little heart was always grieved. Judge then of the reader's astonishment when he discovers that this typical little American is, because of the death of a number of relatives on his father's side, the heir of the great Earl of Dorincourt, and that his true name is Lord Fauntleroy.

How Cedric softens the hard heart of his grandfather, the Earl (a typical English nobleman—proud, domineering, with blood so blue you could use it for ink, but nonetheless a splendid creature and exceedingly rich), and how Cedric makes all his grandfather's tenants happy, and how Cedric persuades his haughty grandfather to accept Dearest, who, though an American, is nevertheless a lady, and how Cedric gets Mr. Hobbs the grocery man and Dick the shoeshine boy to England and settles them close to Dorincourt Castle so that he can go on being democratic at them—all of this is familiar to you. Familiar also are the drawings done for the book by Reginald B. Birch, which made the appearance of all the characters, but especially the ringleted, velvet-suited little lord, familiar to millions of infatuated readers from 1886 at least until 1925.

And there he stood in my music room, confronting Professor Einstein and myself. Not only Fauntleroy, but the huge, drooling, red-eyed mastiff Dougal, his grandfather's pet and the little lord's inseparable companion.

I wondered what he had come for, so with a directness which I was sure such a democratic child would appreciate I put the question.

"What have you come for, m'lord?" said I.

He laughed. It was the characteristic laugh of an innocent child, like silver bells, and it set up an answering echo in the piano.

"I want to ask a favor of Professor Einstein," he said.

"Certainly not," said I. "No guest of Massey College may be asked for favors."

"Oh, please—oh, pretty-please and sugar-plums," said Lord Fauntleroy winsomely. "Surely you haven't forgotten that this is the Year of the Child?"

I had forgotten. In spite of all the newspaper hullabaloo, and appeals for this, that, and the other thing to increase the influence

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of children, I had forgotten. Certainly I had not expected the Year of the Child to have anything to do with our College Ghost.

"The Year of the Child is more important than rules," said Fauntleroy. "Oh, you'd probably never guess how important for the peace of the world. You know, don't you, that some dear, kind people are trying to establish a Children's Bill of Rights?"

I admitted that I had heard something of the sort. Einstein didn't bother to answer; he was regarding Little Lord Fauntleroy with big, sad eyes, the expression of which I could read. It was an expression of great weariness, mingled with a noble compassion. It was also the expression of an influential person confronted with a remorseless beggar.

"That is why I have come for advice to Professor Einstein, the author of *Why War?*" said the beautiful boy. "The best of us want a sensible Bill of Rights. You know the sort of thing: nobody is to beat children more than is good for them, and savage people are not to eat children except in case of real necessity, and children are to be loved except when they are unlovable, and children are to be seen and not heard except for exceptional children like me, and children are to be taught sensibly by sensible people, and children are to have pocket-money but not enough to make it possible for them to get into serious trouble. And in return children undertake to be reasonable and pretend to be innocent and believe in Santa Claus and babies being brought by the doctor and all that crap—oh, what have I said!"

"You said 'and all that crap,' " said I, wishing to be helpful. Little Lord Fauntleroy was hiding his face in his hands, the very picture of shame.

"I know I did," he said. "How could I! What would Dearest say if she heard me use such a horrid word! But He makes me do it! It's His terrible influence. Oh, if I were not the sweetest, most forgiving little soul anybody ever heard of, I could hate Him!"

To emphasize the general grief, the big dog, Dougal, set up a melancholy howling and lashed the piano keys with his great tail.

It was here that Professor Einstein intervened. "My boy," he said, "if you expect us to understand you, do not begin your story in the middle and wriggle out toward both ends. I recommend the Scientific Method: state your principal thesis, develop it, and work toward a conclusion."

Little Lord Fauntleroy took his hands from his face and looked at the great man with adoration.

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"Just what I wanted," said he. "You are so wise, Professor Einstein, I knew you could help me. I shall do as you say. Please, may I sit on your knee?"

Einstein pondered for a moment, then said, "No." My respect for his wisdom rose sharply. "Just stand where you are, and I shall sit down, and you shall tell us both, quietly and clearly, what the trouble is. Now, first of all, where do you come from?"

"From Paradise," said the Miraculous Child. "Oh, it's not at all the way silly people imagine. It's really a huge confederation of self-governing Paradises where everybody can enjoy Eternity with the sort of people they like best. There aren't any grownups in the Children's Paradise, or else it wouldn't be a Paradise for children. And of course the fact that we're all in the Children's Paradise makes the other Paradises paradisal for the grownups."

"Quite true," said Einstein. "I cannot recall ever having seen or heard a child since I entered the Physics Division of the Intellectuals' Paradise."

I was troubled by a doubt. "One moment," I said. "It has always been my understanding that Paradise is for the living who have passed into rest. But you, my lord, never lived. Explain yourself."

"Oh, you dear old silly-billy," said Fauntleroy, putting his graceful little hand on my sleeve, as Dougal smeared my trousers with phantom drool. "You, an author of a sort, to say such a thing! You know jolly well that I lived more fully and gloriously than the ordinary run of children. I was loved by millions of people who had no children of their own. We children of literature are the aristocracy of the Children's Paradise. We are remembered for generations, when the real children who didn't have the luck to live to maturity are forgotten, poor little mites! We set the tone of the place. In a quiet way, we run it!

"There are the Dickens Group—Little Paul Dombey and Tiny Tim and Little Nell—and there are the Outdoors Types—Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Midshipman Easy, Jackanapes, and Penrod and lots of others—and there are the littlest ones like the Bobbsey Twins and Budge and Toddy, and there are the Fairy Tale Gang—Rose Red and Snow White and Jack the Giant Killer and all those. You wouldn't believe what a lot there are, and we are all so much more vivid than the flesh-and-blood children that we naturally take the lead. Or we did," said the boy, his beautiful countenance darkening, "until He came."

"A rival?" I said.

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"Not a rival," said the boy with what in a lesser child might have been taken for a pout, "a usurper."

"Same thing," said I. "Let's hear about it."

"Everything in the Children's Paradise was paradisal," said Fauntleroy, "so long as I was the boss. I took care that everybody was happy; I wouldn't tolerate an instant's discord. If any of my agents reported anything to me—"

"Agents?" said Professor Einstein. "Spies, do you mean?"

"Don't be horrid," said Fauntleroy, smiling his reproach. "Just children who were either naturally very sharp, like the Artful Dodger, and Gavroche out of *Les Miserables,* or else children who were abnormally trustworthy, like Casabianca—you know, the Boy Who Stood on the Burning Deck. If they saw any trouble brewing, they tipped me off and I dealt with it at once. And if the child didn't see things differently then, Dougal had a little romp with it—that always worked."

Dougal gave a sudden lurch that almost knocked me off my chair, and I saw what a romp might involve.

"Let's hear about the usurper," I said.

"You know how things have been on earth for the past twenty years," said Fauntleroy. "Turbulence everywhere—among nations, among university students, and even among children. In fact, the modern child has simply been going straight to—"

Here he blushed deeply, and whispered something in Professor Einstein's ear.

"And the usurper came from hell?" said Professor Einstein.

"No, from Toronto," said Fauntleroy. "His name is Gold-Tooth Flanagan. He is very proud of his gold tooth. He got it by ripping off old-age pensioners in supermarkets until he had enough money to buy it. It was his mark of authority. It is a huge adult-size gold tooth, in the worst possible taste. But of course that sort of life can have but one end: Gold-Tooth was knocked on the head with a bottle in a police raid in Cabbage Town, and to his surprise he was sent to the Children's Paradise. Of course, he wanted to go to the Hooligans' Paradise, but he was too young, so he came to us instead. Nobody's fault but his own; he peaked too soon."

"And he tried to take over the Children's Paradise?" said I.

"From the beginning," said Fauntleroy. "He said very offensive things. He started by picking on a literary child from the Third World we have always known as Little Black Sambo. Gold-Tooth called him a horrid racist name, and when I rebuked him—gently,

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of course, for he was new and didn't know our ways—he asked me if I was gay. I said of course I was, and that Dearest had always loved me for being so gay, and he laughed offensively and mimicked me rudely. It wasn't until Holden Caulfield told me what 'gay' means to minds like Flanagan's that I understood that I had been insulted. Gay, indeed! Me! As if for years I hadn't been on a footing of special intimacy with Little Miss Muffet!"

"Didn't it occur to you to put Dougal on him?" said I.

"I was coming to that, just when the real trouble blew up," said Fauntleroy. "Of course, Flanagan sat in on our meetings where we discussed the nature of the Child's Bill of Rights; they were fully democratic, so he couldn't be left out. We were trying to hammer out something along the lines I've already mentioned to you. You see, at United Nations and UNESCO all the children's business is done by adults, who have no idea of what a sensible child wants. The last thing we want is any kind of independence—make us independent and we have lost all our power. To deal as we think best with adults, we must be entirely under their thumbs, which is the same thing as being on their backs: our weakness is our strength, every child knows that."

"This child is wise beyond his years," said Einstein.

"Indeed I am," said Little Lord Fauntleroy. "But Gold-Tooth Flanagan simply didn't know his business as a child. He was agitating for a Bill of Rights that would allow children to vote at the age of three, and get liquor and dope, and sue their parents for failure to bring them up properly, and ensure that when couples divorced all the assets were placed in the hands of their children—such crazy stuff as you never heard of, stuff that would have robbed children of all their real power and loaded them down with a lot of hard work and financial responsibility. So it came to a showdown."

"Don't tell me Gold-Tooth Flanagan won!" said I.

"For the present, it's a draw," said Fauntleroy. "You see, the meeting became more and more unruly, and finally Gold-Tooth called Christopher Robin a mother. At first I didn't think anything of that, because to me a mother means Dearest, but a Greek boy out of *Aesop's Fables* was sitting on the platform near me and he whispered that it was a very offensive expression and meant somebody called Oedipus, so I asked Gold-Tooth to explain himself, and to the horror of everybody he did.

"Christopher Robin cried, and Alice from Wonderland hit Gold-Tooth with a croquet mallet. When order was restored, I had to

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speak very sharply to Gold-Tooth and he challenged me to a fight. I said I would fight him if Dougal were allowed to be the referee, but he wouldn't have that, and it looked for a moment as if things were going to be very uneven until Huck Finn slipped something into my right hand which he said would help, and I very cleverly hit Gold-Tooth when he wasn't looking and he fell down. But he jumped right up again and shouted Foul, and when I looked at my hand I saw that Huck had put a horseshoe in it. Then Gold-Tooth attacked me unfairly and without warning, and fought in a way that was utterly un-American, and even un-English, and when it was all over—my authority was gone."

Here the beautiful child faltered and broke into bitter sobs.

Professor Einstein and I exchanged glances. The same thing was in both our minds.

With a gentle hand, the great scientist reached out toward the golden curls and removed what was all too plainly a wig. The head beneath had been snatched bald. Little Lord Fauntleroy, at the hands of the unspeakable Gold-Tooth Flanagan, had suffered the fate of Samson.

"Have you tried rubbing it with white of egg?" the great man asked.

"Or perhaps a top-dressing of organic fertilizer?" said I.

"It will take months to grow to its full length," said Fauntleroy, "and we have no time. Unless the horrible plan for a Children's Bill of Rights—with which Gold-Tooth Flanagan is at this very moment interpenetrating the brain cells of the Assembly at the U.N.—is thwarted, society as we have known it must collapse. Children will rule! Can you imagine what that will lead to?"

"I am not sure that children would do worse with the world than their elders have done," said Professor Einstein.

"That would depend on what children," said I. "Take the advice of a man steeped in literature and legend. This is War in Heaven, and instead of a defeat in which Gold-Tooth Flanagan is cast down into the Pit, to howl in torment with all his evil followers, he has achieved dominance."

"Indeed he has," said Fauntleroy. "He's strutting around the Children's Paradise flashing his gold tooth and wearing my hair!"

"I see that you are right," said Professor Einstein. "Like many childless people, I tend to have an extravagantly high opinion of children."

"You must reread *King Lear*," said I.

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"I shall do so," said he. "But meanwhile, my child, do not lose heart. I shall go to the United Nations Assembly, where I still have some spiritual influence, and do what I can."

The face of Little Lord Fauntleroy was suffused with a flush of rapture. He rushed to the great man and covered his face with kisses, while Dougal licked Einstein's violin with his huge tongue, making it disagreeably wet.

"Meanwhile, to be on the safe side, you might try this," said I, taking a small black bottle from beneath the top of the piano.

"You dear old souls," said the Wondrous Child, his eyes filling with tears, "shall I really regain my hair?"

"That isn't hair tonic," said I. "That is a substance I use for cleaning my piano keys. It is drastic if taken internally; for instance, by anyone who was using it to clean a gold tooth."

If I am not mistaken, the child winked at me. "Oh, what a lovely practical joke that would be," he said. "Of course, Gold-Tooth is beyond Death, but he is certainly not beyond humiliation." Then, seizing Dougal by the collar, Lord Fauntleroy and the great dog ran toward the door. Before they reached it, they had grown dim, and vanished.

"Do you really think that children may take over the world?" I said to Professor Einstein.

"I cannot believe it," said the great physicist. "Have I not said that God does not play at dice with the fate of the Universe?"

Once again he raised his bow, and off we went into Bach. But because of Dougal's energetic licking, his violin was sadly out of tune. The sound grew fainter, and I was aware of a decline in my own musical abilities until I found myself playing alone, and playing badly, and I knew that the seventeenth ghostly visitation to Massey College had reached its end.

"Q"

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a distinguished reprint by

T. S. STRIBLING

One of two reprints chosen for your Christmas reading, "The Mystery of the Choir Boy" first appeared in the January 1951 issue of EQMM with the following introduction by Ellery Queen:

"In December 1949 we received a letter from T. S. Stribling which began: Dear EQ: I am sending you something for a Christmas present—a story which is a literary criticism of the title of your magazine. I take exception to the word 'Mystery.' You don't really publish 'mysteries' in your magazine—not in the true sense of the word. You publish—but we'll let my new Poggioli story settle that.

"So, our Christmas present from Tom Stribling last year is your Christmas present this year. We think most of you will agree that 'The Mystery of the Choir Boy' is the second most unusual Poggioli story Mr. Stribling has ever written, and we hope most of you will find it, as we did, not only a moving and mature 'mystery' but a deeply philosophical story of the Christmas spirit."

Wishing you the same, we have rewrapped Mr. Stribling's gift to EQ—and to EQMM readers—of almost forty years ago . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHOIR BOY

by T. S. STRIBLING

It was the night before Christmas, and at the dinner table Professor Poggioli took me to task about the word "mystery," which I use in the titles of my accounts of his criminological investigations. He said they were not mysteries, there was no such thing as a "mystery" in crime—riddles, perhaps, but not mystery.

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I got out my dictionary and read to him: "Mystery: something hidden, unknown, unexplained."

He brushed all that aside as the crudest modernism. "Mystery," he said, "is really a religious term; it has to do with the inscrutable ways of Providence—the mysteries of Dionysus, the mysteries of Ishtar, the early Christian mysteries—until our Western world went consciously or unconsciously materialistic, and true mysteries ceased to be." Here, happily, our doorbell rang and his flood of erudition was dammed.

To my surprise, on our stoop stood Dr. V. Olin May, rector of the Church of Tiamara. I knew at once he had come to the wrong address. Dr. May's parishioners start in at a minimum of half a million and go on up to several millions a head. So when I saw him on our stoop I knew he had missed his address by at least four hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. I redirected him in all good will, saying: "Dr. May, this is 13 Acacia Street. I imagine you are looking for 13 Ocean Drive, which is a hundred blocks east, or for 13013 Acacia Street, which is a hundred blocks north."

He referred to an address on a slip of paper. "I was looking for Dr. Henry Poggioli—the, er, psychologist."

Years of association with Poggioli have made me almost as clever at analyzing people as he is. I knew when Dr. May hesitated over the word "psychologist" that he had started to say "criminologist," but of course the rector of the Church of Tiamara could hardly be going around hunting for a "criminologist," so he switched, professionally, to "psychologist." I wondered what had brought him. Poggioli is very good at looking at a person and knowing what he wants, so I thought I would make a stab at it myself.

"You want to see him," I suggested in a casual fashion, "about your, mm, your collections, say?"

He was quite surprised. "No, I'm not soliciting contributions."

I saw I was completely wrong, so I said no more and invited him in to see my friend.

As we entered the breakfast alcove and I announced our visitor, Poggioli gave him an appraising glance and said, "Yes, Dr. May, you want to see me about James Berelli, I believe."

The minister's face took on an expression of bewilderment. "Dr. Poggioli, I don't quite see how you—"

"That was a deduction—a fairly simple deduction. You see, I was reading about Berelli as you came in."

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"But I don't see why you should connect me with a—" Dr. May hesitated, unwilling to use the term "racketeer," which Berelli was.

"I will explain. I was just reading an article in the paper giving Berelli's life history, and in a very sympathetic way. Now, the only reason a man like Berelli courts publicity would be to change his status in society. He contemplates making some sort of social or spiritual change—a reformation."

"But why did you think that would involve my church?" queried the rector curiously.

"Well, in the first place, you came to me as a criminologist—so it would be something about a criminal. But my basic reason was this: if Berelli approached any church in Tiamara, it would be yours. In the Middle Ages, churches grouped themselves according to their creeds. Today, churches group themselves according to their wealth and social position. Therefore, if Berelli wished to cast his lot with any congregation in Tiamara, it would be with yours, Dr. May."

"Well, it was fairly simple, after all, wasn't it?"

"Oh, very. In fact, it was obvious."

"And, just for curiosity, what do I want to ask you about him?"

"Mm. As a practitioner of criminal psychology, I would say you wish to ask me if his conversion is genuine or assumed."

"No, that isn't it. He doesn't claim to have made any spiritual change at all."

Poggioli cleared his throat. He doesn't like to misfire, even on the most trivial details. "Then he has offered some contribution to your church and you want to know whether or not to accept it."

"That's closer, Dr. Poggioli. Our board met last night. We were in session until three o'clock this morning. We decided to accept it. So that's settled—that isn't why I need your help."

It does me good to see Poggioli get in a hole and try to squirm out. He's always getting me in holes. He said, "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you just what you do want, Dr. May?"

The divine turned and included me in the controlled but contagious enthusiasm which has made him the leader of the wealthiest church in the wealthiest city (according to population) in America.

"I'll tell you what has happened. The most remarkable answer to prayers that has ever come to my ministry. As you know, our church attempts to reach the very lowliest strata of society in our city, but heretofore we have not been signally successful."

"Yes, I knew you had not been signally successful."

"Well, the other day the most wonderful thing happened to me.

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Mr. Berelli came into my study. He said to me, 'Dr. May, my life has been a failure. I have thrown it away.' I said to him frankly, 'Mr. Berelli, if you had used one-tenth your energy and courage serving God that you have used in serving yourself, you would be the most famous and beloved man in America today.'

"He gave me a kind of smile and said, 'Instead of the most notorious.'

" 'You said that, Mr. Berelli, I didn't.'

" 'Well, anyway, I have come to you to see if I could start over again, Dr. May.' "

Here I interrupted to say, "So he did want to join your congregation, just as Poggioli said?"

"No—no, he didn't. His idea was one of the most imaginative, one of the most inspired—"

"Go ahead," I said, "what was it?"

"Simply this. He wanted to start over. That was his basic idea. He wanted me to choose a boy from the social level from which he himself had sprung. He wanted this boy to have a beautiful voice, so that he could enter our boys' choir class. Then, after we had chosen such a boy, he would see that boy through grammar school and college and then adopt him as a son."

Even I caught my breath at the extent of such a plan. It was amazing and good and benevolent, but mainly it was amazing. The boy would become a many-times millionaire; he would be reared in conformity with the strictest religion and morality, and if he did not actually become a priest himself, he would grow up in the warmest and tenderest relations with the church. I don't think that having another multi-millionaire in his church weighed too heavily with Dr. May—he had more than his share already—but it would allow his church to reach down among the lowest classes, which had been the object of all his hopes and prayers.

"And you want me, as a psychologist, to help you pick the boy," said Poggioli, understanding this visit at last.

"That is correct. I know you will agree with me, Dr. Poggioli, that we must help every sinner, no matter how criminal his background, to find the door to truth and the path to goodness. So will you come to the rectory at twelve minutes after three tomorrow afternoon? I'll have a number of boys there. I would like to meet you earlier, but we have a board meeting tomorrow morning to decide what we will do with ten lots left to our church by Samuel Draggs, who was a pioneer of Tiamara. We must decide whether or not to sell these lots

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to the First National Bank for their new skyscraper or lease it to them for ninety-nine years."

In this undecided state, the minister made his adieus and went out to his Cadillac, which during this interview had been parked incongruously in front of our door.

Naturally, Poggioli and I discussed Berelli's extraordinary proposal. I suggested that Berelli, in his heart, had longed for the peace and purity of a cloistered life even during his involved and ruthless criminal career—now he hoped to obtain that calm religious existence by proxy. Poggioli didn't think so. He thought Berelli hoped to make some sort of shift in his social position that would place him more in accord with his financial status—and, incidentally, many racketeers were now making conspicuous gifts to charity, for its effect, no doubt, on public opinion.

As a last thought, I said to Poggioli, "How do you think Berelli's organization is going to take this?"

"In good stead, I should think. Berelli is an excellent organizer. Undoubtedly, he has already talked the matter over with his lieutenants and gotten their approval."

"You don't think one of them will assassinate him?"

"I'm not sure—we can only hope not. If I made a guess, I would say Berelli is arranging a kind of moral pension-plan which will allow his lieutenants to retire into private life after a certain number of years in crime, with the good will of the country—and, of course, plenty of ready money."

"So it's just a scheme after all," I said.

"No, not precisely. It is the action of men who are tired of crime and want to quit—in princely style, of course."

On the following day—Christmas Day—I went with Poggioli to the rectory. There were fourteen applicants for Berelli's sinecure in the study. The choirmaster, a Mr. Asaph Johnson, had picked them out of the schools in the slum districts of Tiamara proper. There were Cubans, Italians, Jews, Negroes, Germans, Irish, and French among the contesting lads.

Mr. Johnson, the choirmaster, reduced the field to three—a German, an Italian, and an Irish boy. The German boy proved to have too much money in his family to conform to Berelli's ideal, so he was quickly eliminated. This left Patrick McGantry and Angelo Anguisa as the finalists, and here Poggioli's work came in.

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He examined the two candidates carefully. Patrick McGantry came from a family of seven brothers. In Angelo's home there were only two children, Angelo and Angela Anguisa. They were twin brother and sister. Poggioli reasoned in this fashion: Angelo's twin sister would be a profoundly moral and instructive influence in her brother's life. The two were devoted to each other, as is usual among twins. To a boy whose career probably would be ecclesiastical, the influence of an affectionate and guardian sister would mean everything. Thus, while the German boy's material wealth militated against his receiving the appointment, Anguisa's spiritual possessions helped him.

I must say it was quite a moment for the little group in the rector's study when the final decision was made. It seemed incredible that a vast fortune which had been accumulated through crime should, through this boy, be turned to social and religious uses. Angelo himself, when the decision fell on him, was quite lifted out of this world. He was a beautiful boy with a Latin perfection of figure and feature. He put his hand on his heart and murmured, "Me! This has come to me! Oh, God, make me worthy." He then asked if he might telephone his good news to his sister Angela.

Even I was in an exalted mood when we returned to our apartment. I predicted that when Angelo became the racketeer's adopted son, all Berelli's fabulous fortune would come into the service of religion and humanity. Poggioli thought differently.

"Look here," I said, "yesterday you were arguing there would be no catch in this arrangement. Now, apparently, you have changed your mind."

"Oh, no—not at all. I still anticipate no difficulty *inside* Berelli's organization."

I looked at him oddly. "Then where do you anticipate difficulty?"

"Outside, naturally."

I don't like being cut off short like that. "Couldn't you be a little more specific?" I asked crisply.

"Well, yes, I could." He stroked his chin. "I mean that the constitution of life, in this world, is such that great funds accumulated through evil practices cannot be abruptly turned to high and proper ends."

I was utterly amazed. I said, "Poggioli, what in the world do you mean? What is your reason for saying a thing like that?"

"I have no *reason*," stressed my friend. "A reason is a deeper cause

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which produces any given result. When you reach the *final* cause—the very foundation of life—you don't have reasons any more: you have mystery."

I was never so amused by Poggioli's theories. This was simple, sheer superstition. I didn't dream Poggioli was capable of it, and it made me feel highly intellectual and sophisticated by comparison.

During the following days, Poggioli and I heard from Angelo at intervals—through Dr. May. As a matter of fact, Poggioli became a kind of consultant for Dr. May on any problem that arose concerning the Italian boy. Of course, the reason why Poggioli dropped into the role of consultant was perfectly absurd: he was a criminologist—so he became an authority on training boys who were supplied with money out of criminal funds. It is very silly, but it is also very human.

Dr. May reported that the racketeer was becoming deeply and sincerely attached to the handsome choir boy. The lad was apparently an ideal which Berelli had always had in his mind. I had an idea that the racketeer at times had longed to be a saint. This boy was his alter ego, becoming a blessed mortal. Berelli was to be the morass out of which would bloom this orchid of the swamp.

The first important question that came up between protector and ward was the matter of allowance. Berelli wanted to give the boy a hundred and fifty dollars a week. Poggioli advised that it be reduced to twenty-five. But if the racketeer's actual cash gifts were restricted, he made up for it by the various presents he gave to his foster son. He bought Angelo a motorcycle, a rifle, and an amateur-radio-broadcasting set. He presented the whole boys' choir with full football equipment and rigged up the basement of the church as a gymnasium.

Dr. May approved heartily of all this, for it was really the sort of thing the ministry promotes nowadays. Poggioli remained noncommittal.

As for myself, I will admit with a certain embarrassment that I was dubious about it. My doubt arose in a very irrational way. I scoffed at Poggioli's feeling of "Fate" connected with the unlawful gains of crime, and yet so great an intellectual authority had my friend gained over me that I really felt as he did. I expected at any moment some interruption, some rupture in this queer and unnatural relationship between a choir boy and America's Public Enemy Number One . . .

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Again at the breakfast table one morning, for that is where we read our paper—Poggioli taking the first, second, third, and fifth pages, which are the crime sheets of American newspapers, and I taking the sporting and the comic pages—my friend lowered his paper, looked over it with a strange expression, and exclaimed, "So you were right! The bolt has struck!"

I knew at once what it was. "What has happened to Angelo?"

"Nothing. Nothing to the boy. But his sister is gone."

I had forgotten Angelo's twin sister. I had to reflect to know who he was talking about. Then I asked what had happened to her.

For answer, Poggioli read aloud: "Miss Angela Anguisa, a beautiful Italian girl living at 321 Elwood Street, was drowned at a beach party Thursday evening. She is the sister of Angelo Anguisa of the Church of Tiamara Choir. Since Miss Anguisa was an expert swimmer, it is supposed she swam out beyond her strength. Her body has not yet been recovered."

A wave of sympathy went over me for Angelo. I knew how attached the boy had been to his sister. Then the words Poggioli had used struck me as odd. "What do you mean—'the bolt has struck'?" I asked. "The girl simply drowned. It happens here on the beaches twenty times a season."

"They are ordinary casualties—accidents."

"You don't think this was an accident?"

"I'm sure it wasn't."

A little grue tickled my scalp. "Why?"

"The guards haven't found her body."

"I know that, but quite often the guards don't find a body, especially when the drowning occurs in the evening."

"Well, to tell the truth, that really wasn't my reason. I think mathematics are against Angela having drowned."

This seemed to make no sense at all, but I knew somehow it must. I said, "Why do you believe that?"

"Because, as you say, about twenty bathers drown a season, out of hundreds of thousands who bathe. The percentage of drownings is very low. Now the probability that some of the malcontents—some of the dissatisfied of Berelli's gang who don't like having a choirboy protege in their organization—did away with the girl to hurt Angelo is a much higher percentage than that she drowned."

"Why, that's the most horrible—I don't believe it."

"That's your own theory. I'm merely quoting. You remember I doubted it at first."

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"But if they did murder her, how did they do it?"

"I don't know. It's possible some swimming companion went out with her and drowned her and then swam back. It was dark."

I sat thinking over the grisly possibility. Then I said, "Why don't you investigate, Poggioli?"

"Well—she's gone now. If I discovered anything criminal, it would involve the church and ruin Angelo's career. It would stop Berelli's attempt to rehabilitate himself in decent society. He could not possibly be the one who killed her."

"No, of course not. I wish I knew what did happen. I hope it was just an accident, as the paper says."

That afternoon, Poggioli and I visited the rectory. We found Angelo overwhelmed with grief. Dr. May mentioned the inscrutable will of God. Poggioli found opportunity to ask the rector privately if any of Berelli's men had ever showed any jealousy of Angelo. I liked the way the psychologist put it—"men" instead of "gang." That way, it didn't suggest the church had formed low associations.

Dr. May understood at once. May was a very brilliant man. Any pastor of a hundred-million-dollar congregation has to be a brilliant man, because he has a difficult congregation. So he said, "Oh, no, not the slightest evidence of ill will anywhere." Then he added, "There would be no way to intimidate Angelo. From what I've seen of him with the other boys, he seems the gentlest of creatures—yet he's absolutely tenacious and fearless. If he were only a little less impulsive—but he's just a boy yet. That trait in his nature will modify with years."

Poggioli's suspicions affected me in a peculiar way. Angela's death hung over me like a pall. I found myself continually expecting some further clue. The feeling would come over me at the most irrational moments—when our doorbell rang, when our telephone buzzed—that we were about to hear from Angela. I mentioned it to Poggioli and he gave me a sleeping tablet one or two nights. I don't know whether they helped me or not.

But I do know that I was awake at one o'clock Wednesday morning when our telephone rang. The hour, naturally, stressed my preoccupation with the drowned girl, because she had vanished in the night.

Poggioli answered the call. I listened nervously and I heard him say with a note of surprise, "Is that you, Angelo? —Yes, I know you can't sleep, but it is almost as good to lie relaxed. —You want to

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know something? Certainly. Yes, I was awake, anyway. —The owner of the yacht *Santa Fortuna?* I don't know who the owner is. Why do you want to know? —You got the name over your wireless. Well, call up Jenkins at the *Times* office. He knows every yacht on this coast and who owns it." I heard Poggioli hang up.

I called to him. "Was that something about Angela?"

"If you don't go to sleep," he answered, "I'll give you another pill. It seems that everybody is awake tonight."

"Including yourself," I said.

"That's correct—including myself."

A few hours later, I was still awake when I heard the newsboy throw in our paper and Poggioli go out on the stoop to get it. Ordinarily, he never rises early. A few minutes later my door eased open and Poggioli put in his head. "Awake?" he asked, in a voice low enough not to awaken me.

"So it was about Angela?" I said.

"The telephone call? No. The paper, yes. Berelli's dead."

A grue went over me. "Berelli!" There was a peculiar pathos in this racketeer trying to reform his life. "One of his gang, I suppose, who disagreed about Angelo and the church and all that."

"That's what the editorial in the paper thinks."

"But you don't think so?"

"I don't know. That seems to be the solution on the face of it. The paper says there's got to be a cleanup—there always has to be a cleanup after a killing. I wonder why they don't do it sometimes *before* a killing."

"They might if they knew when it was going to be," I said, trying to inject a lighter touch to a grim morning.

"Berelli's death isn't the really extraordinary thing about the news," said Poggioli. "It's his adoption of Angelo—it was made final yesterday. Here's a little notice of it on the fourth page. The boy has inherited everything Berelli owns—or at least all the court can prove he owns."

This threw a strange light over Berelli's murder.

"Then they killed him after it was too late?"

"*If* they killed him."

"They were the only ones who had a motive."

"But men in a criminal organization don't usually kill too late. Nor do they usually kill simply for revenge. They murder for a profit."

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"Then why did they kill him?"

"I don't know whether they killed him or not. Somehow I can't believe they did."

"Then who—"

"I don't know. But if they did kill him after Angelo's adoption was made legal, it will let their organization in for an endless amount of official investigation—bookkeeping, income-tax checkups, and so forth. But the syndicate would have thought of all that in advance." Poggioli withdrew from my room and went to the kitchen to make coffee.

With this uncertainty and suspense nibbling at our nerves, nothing further happened until two o'clock in the afternoon on the following day. The telephone rang, and when I hurried to it a voice asked in my ear if this was Mr. Poggioli's residence. His pronunciation, his use of "Mister" instead of "Doctor" or "Professor," showed that he not only didn't read my published accounts of Poggioli's investigations but that he knew nothing of Poggioli's background. I said, "Yes, this is Professor Poggioli's residence. Who are you?"

"This is Dutch Swein. I'm one of Berelli's men. The cops grabbed me a while ago and I'm out on bail. I want this Poggioli to spring me permanent."

"You mean you're under arrest for Berelli's murder?"

"That's right."

"Well, listen, Mr. Swein. If you killed Berelli, you don't need a criminologist—he would just get you in deeper. You need a lawyer."

"*You* listen, mister. I know my own business. I know enough to hire a lawyer when I'm guilty and a detective when I ain't. This time I'm hiring a detective."

"Okay, you're hiring a detective," I agreed in exasperation, "but if any of your pals killed Berelli, Poggioli will still get you. You have to be completely in the clear—not mixed up in it at all."

"I'm hiring a detective, I tell you," repeated Swein, "and I'll see you shortly."

There's no use describing Mr. Swein's arrival at our apartment in his imported Italian car, or his jewelry or his hand-painted tie or his clothes. He had the look of a big-time racketeer out on a hundred-thousand-dollar bond. It was what he said that interested me.

"Poggioli," he began forthrightly, "I don't know who bumped off Berelli. And when I say I don't know who bumped him off, I mean

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our whole organization don't know. We wish we did, but it wasn't us."

I interrupted to mention the newspaper theory that Berelli had been murdered because he had legally adopted Angelo and was about to give all his money to the choir boy.

"The hell you say," flung out Swein. "Them was the plans of our whole syndicate—it wasn't just Berelli's. We all talked this choir-boy deal over. We thought it would put us in right with the public. We thought if we was going to take so much from the come-ons, it wouldn't do no harm to give back a little to churches and charity and so on—build up good will for us instead of against us. It was bound to help us in jury trials whenever we might come to jury trials."

Such was Mr. Swein and his statement. Naturally, Poggioli did not take the commission of discovering the real murderer and freeing the Berelli gang of suspicion and legal inconvenience. He explained that he already was morally connected with the prosecuting side of the case, through his association with Dr. May and the church, and while he would never take an active part in the prosecution neither could he defend the suspects.

If Mr. Swein's visit did nothing else, it deepened the mystery of who killed Berelli. I asked Poggioli, not without some touch of irony, if he didn't think this was a mystery—in his sense of the word. He said, "It is puzzling, it is outré, it is at present unexplained. But I am sure that it is explicable. Anything that can be explained is not really a mystery."

I let the point drop. There was no use quibbling over a definition when we were so shaken over Berelli's abrupt end.

What made the tragedy so poignant was that the racketeer was trying to reinstate himself in society. According to Swein's version, this effort was insincere—he had merely been trying to protect his own lawless interests by giving them a high moral aspect. But that is the beginning of all human law—the effort of men in power to give oppressive actions a high moral aspect. But somebody had stopped Berelli.

Was it someone who perceived that the racketeer's program might lead eventually to gang rule in America, and who stressed his disapproval by this murder?

The only man I knew who had brains enough to see where Berelli's moral extension might lead was Dr. May. Yet the idea was fantastic. I wanted to mention it to Poggioli, but I couldn't bring myself to . . .

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In all the records of Tiamara journalism there was never a greater ado than was made over the imminent inheritance of the Berelli estate by Angelo Anguisa. Ordinarily, Americans trumpet rags-to-riches stories about boys who work their own way upward. But that is a purely national development. The universal fairy tale, prevalent from Novaya Zemlya to Rhodesia, is the magical translation of the pure, good boy to great riches without any labor other than virtue. It is a charming, popular fable that simple goodness will bring its own great reward, because it apparently places fortune within anybody's reach. Everybody seemed to agree that Angelo deserved his good luck. Poggioli had telephone calls congratulating him as a kind of master-of-ceremonies to the young Italian's good fortune. I myself fell in the way of answering these calls and saying some conventional and appropriate thing to Angelo's well-wishers.

Then one day a girl's voice spoke in the receiver and asked to see Dr. Poggioli.

"You want to speak to him about Angelo Anguisa?" I asked.

In a tense tone, the girl said she did.

"Then may I take a message? He is very busy right now."

The voice in the receiver trembled. "Tell him that we—we wish he would come over to the rectory and see Angelo. He refuses to accept his inheritance."

I felt as if the floor swayed under me. "Refuses to accept! What does he want to do?"

"He says he is going to the docks to work as a longshoreman, like our father used to do."

"But why?"

"He won't say. He says if Dr. Poggioli will come over he will know."

"He will know what?"

"Dr. Poggioli will know what's the matter with Angelo."

"Who is this I'm talking to?"

"Angelo's sister—Angela Anguisa."

"But," I said, "Angela was drowned."

"No, I was not drowned. I flew back to Tiamara from Belem."

I asked what she was doing in Belem. She said she was flown to Belem from the yacht *Santa Fortuna*. I asked other questions—I don't know what. I received answers that slipped out of my head the moment I heard them.

Angela was not drowned!

With this astonishing, mystifying message, I hurried to Poggioli

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and begged him to hasten with me to the rectory to see what was wrong with Angelo Anguisa.

The moment I mentioned the yacht *Santa Fortuna*, Poggioli's confusion seemed to clear up. "That's the clue!" he exclaimed. "That's the master key—the *Santa Fortuna!*"

"What do you mean? A yacht the master key?"

"Certainly! Are you blind? Don't you remember, Angelo telephoned us on the night of the Berelli murder to know who was the owner of the yacht. Now we know that Angela was on the *Santa Fortuna* and was flown to Belem—and that Berelli was shot."

"But why was he shot?" I cried.

"There you have put your finger on the incomprehensible feature of the case. Why was he shot? Angelo's sister was flown back home just as Berelli evidently promised the boy."

I broke into this, understanding nothing of what he was saying. "Poggioli," I begged, "let's get started to the rectory and you can tell me what happened on the way over."

We hurried out to the street. "You see, of course, why he refuses the inheritance?" said Poggioli.

"I understand nothing about it—nothing. He said you would understand without him having to tell you. That's why he wants you to come over—so you can tell him what to do. But I understand nothing."

We saw a cab coming and ran to meet it. When we got in, Poggioli began explaining as if to a small child.

"If Angela flew from the *Santa Fortuna* to Belem, then she was on the yacht."

"Yes, I know that."

"She was on the yacht against her will. Somebody put her there."

"Yes, I see that, too."

"If Angelo received a message from the *Santa Fortuna*, Angela must somehow have got into the radio room and sent it out herself. She must have known something about broadcasting—she probably learned about it from her brother. Berelli had given Angelo an amateur broadcasting set. She made contact with Angelo for a few minutes, perhaps seconds, then she was discovered and—and stopped."

A terrifying picture formed in my head. "That must have been why Angelo asked who owned the yacht *Santa Fortuna?*"

"Certainly. All he knew was the name—that was all he had time to hear. I turned him over to Jenkins, and of course Jenkins knew

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that Berelli owned the *Santa Fortuna*. I imagine that Jenkins also knew exactly the sort of traffic the *Santa Fortuna* was engaged in. When Angelo learned it was Berelli, he went to his foster-father's home—with the rifle Berelli himself had given him."

"And killed him!"

"Certainly. That was the night of the Berelli murder."

"Well, I—but why did he kill his adopted father when it was Berelli who got his sister off the ship and back to Tiamara again?"

"That's the puzzling feature. Why did he do it?"

We rode on to the rectory. The astonishing, the unbelievable sequence of events that led to Berelli's murder moved through my imagination with the dreadful authority of a Greek tragedy. They fit into each other like the pieces of some deadly bomb: Berelli trying to reform, Poggioli selecting a sensitive boy, the gift of the gun and the radio-broadcasting set from foster father to foster son, the kidnaping and attempted degradation of the sister, Angela's rescue by her brother, and even after her rescue the murder of Berelli. That was the ground floor of logic. There could be no reasons deeper than those.

At the rectory door, we met Angela. It was the first time we'd ever seen the girl. It flashed through my head that such a creature would have brought Berelli hundreds of thousands of cruzeiros delivered in Rio.

Angela thanked Poggioli for coming so soon and said Angelo was waiting for him in the study.

The psychologist studied the girl intently. "You have no idea what's wrong with him, Angela?"

"No. I don't know what's wrong, Dr. Poggioli."

"And he hasn't told Dr. May what's wrong?"

"He says he never means to tell anybody anything. He says you will know and you'll tell him what to do."

"All right. I'll go in and see him."

We went together into the study. I'm sure Angelo never knew I was in the room. He lay prone on a sofa, his arms under his face. Poggioli sat down on the edge of the couch and put a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Angelo, I'm here."

"Well, you know what I did. I don't have to tell you."

"No, you don't have to tell me, Angelo."

"What must I do—kill myself, too?"

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"No, don't do that. But tell me: why did you shoot him, Angelo, after he promised to get your sister back? Did he say he knew his men had taken Angela?"

"No, Dr. Poggioli, he said he didn't know it. He said he tried not to know anything at all about that part of the syndicate's business. He said he was getting out of the whole thing as fast as he could. He said that's why his men *took* her—because he refused to hear any details at all. He said that if he'd known it was my sister, nothing would have induced him to send her off."

"And you knew he would radio and get her back to you?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Then why did you do it?"

"Because I felt that if—if he would ship away *anybody's* sister on his yacht like that, then God would want him killed."

DETECTIVERSE

SORRY ABOUT THAT, HON

by RUBY HORANSKY

Crack dealer Harry McGlover
Erred when he took a new lover.
They were having great fun
Till she pulled out her gun
And said, "I'm a cop undercover."

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Over the years, there have been scattered examples of the "mystery fan's mystery"—stories set in a background of writing and publishing with real people appearing as characters, sometimes by their right names (usually as extras or bit players) and other times thinly disguised (as full-fledged victims, suspects, and sleuths). Some early examples include Brett Halliday's *She Woke to Darkness* (1954), Fred Levon's *Much Ado About Murder* (1955), and Edward D. Hoch's *The Shattered Raven* (1969).

With the growth of mystery fandom in recent years, these insiders' mysteries have become more plentiful, employing such backgrounds as Bouchercons, mystery bookstores, writers' conferences, and murder games with celebrity suspects. Among the best are two of Max Allan Collins' Mallory books, *Kill Your Darlings* (1984), involving a Chicago Bouchercon, and *Nice Weekend for a Murder* (1986), set at a Mohonk Mountain House mystery weekend. A related subgenre is the Sherlockian mystery, not an outright pastiche of the Doyle originals but a story about other characters with Sherlockian interests or involvements. Examples include Anthony Boucher's *The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars* (1940), Gladys Mitchell's *Watson's Choice* (1955), and Arthur Lewis's *Copper Beeches* (1971). Following find a prime new representative of each of these types.

*** William L. DeAndrea: *Killed in Paradise,* Mysterious Press, $15.95. TV-network troubleshooter Matt Cobb escorts the winner of a radio prize contest on a Caribbean cruise featuring a murder game, staged by Karen and Bill Palmer of Bogie's Restaurant in New York (real people, real restaurant) and starring such mystery celebrities as Philip DeGrave and Nicola Andrews (real writers under pseudonyms) and macho private-eye chronicler Lee H. Schaeffer (whose resemblance to any real writer's pen name is "strictly coincidental"). DeAndrea does a nice job with the comic possibilities of confusing a real-life mystery with a manufactured one and resists overdoing the "in" references. There are plenty of allusions for fully marinated mystery buffs, but one could miss them all and still be entertained by the witty narrative and well clued puzzle.

*** Julian Symons: *The Kentish Manor Murders,* Viking, $15.95. Sheridan Haynes, a British television actor inextricably identified with Sherlock Holmes, first tried his own hand at detection in Symons's *A Three-Pipe Problem* (1975). He now returns in a case involving a reclusive American billionaire and a newly discovered Holmes manuscript purportedly in Doyle's own hand. A smooth and enjoyable job from one of mystery fiction's all-rounders.

*** Sue Grafton: *"E" Is for Evi-*

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dence, Holt, $15.95. Kinsey Millhone is either the best of the female private eyes or in a photo finish. Her cases have won three Anthony awards, the fan-voted prizes presented at the annual Bouchercon, two for novels and a third for a short story. Here she investigates a warehouse fire and becomes the victim of a frameup when an unexplained $5,000 turns up in her bank account. The plot and investigative procedures are fine, but the complex character and humorous narrative style of Kinsey are the novel's best features.

*** James Melville: *The Reluctant Ronin,* Scribners, $15.95. Involving arson and the murder of a visiting Dutch woman, Superintendent Otani's latest adventure provides the usual interesting picture of Japanese lifestyles along with a fairly clued puzzle plot. However, one piece of continuing misdirection (involving the disappearance of Otani's son-in-law) will be hard for some readers to accept, and Melville's Japanese are sometimes a bit too British—the fourteenth chapter has cop and witness sounding like characters in *Coronation Street.*

*** Keith Peterson: *There Fell a Shadow,* Bantam, $3.50. The best new sleuth of 1988 may well be New York reporter John Wells, a hard-drinking, hard-puffing, self-destructive newspaperman in the familiar tradition. Like the character himself, his second case hews to mystery conventions but gives them a refreshingly original slant. Those who love New York, whether up close or from a safe distance, will especially enjoy an assassination attempt in F.A.O. Schwartz, a chase in Central Park, and a beautifully atmospheric opening description of a Manhattan snowstorm.

*** Elmore Leonard: *Freaky Deaky,* Arbor House, $18.95. Detroit cop Chris Mankowski leaves the bomb squad for vice but can't seem to put the explosives behind him as he duels a couple of reunited 'Sixties dissidents with a plot to rip off an addled millionaire. The dialogue and characters are fine, the structure very cinematic, and George Will's blurb is on the money: if you read the first chapter, you'll be unlikely to leave the book unfinished. On the basis of this book and his Edgar-winning *La Brava,* I'd say Leonard is slightly overrated, but a writer who's received his critical adulation can be *very* overrated and still awfully good.

** Leo Bruce: *Death on Allhallowe'en,* Academy Chicago, $4.95. First published in Britain in 1970, this is the latest about schoolmaster-sleuth Carolus Deene to have a belated American debut. Amusing and enjoyable, though not among Bruce's best, it concerns suspicions of witchcraft and Satanism in an isolated village in Kent. Mary Flock's witty cover illustration is outstanding.

** Keith Miles: *Double Eagle,* Harper and Row, $15.95. As in his first novel about British golf pro Alex Saxon, 1987's *Bullet Hole,* Miles offers plenty to carp about: the laughable stupidity of some of Saxon's moves following the murder of American pro Zuke Everett; characters straight out of stock; and a Southern California setting

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just that little bit off, with outdated slang (e.g., "wetback") and unlikely L.A. cops whose crude speech and manners are straight out of decades-old fiction. Still, the story is undeniably readable and Miles offers a nice balance of detection and golfing action.

Among the recent reprints are a trio of 1987 novels. William Murray's *When the Fat Man Sings* (Bantam, $3.95), his third about magician and horseplayer Shifty Lou Anderson, combines knowledgable backgrounds of racing and opera with humorous style and deft characterization. Andrew M. Greeley's *Happy Are Those Who Thirst for Justice* (Warner, $4.50), another Golden Age-style puzzle for Father Blackie Ryan, is diverting and enjoyable despite some plot problems and the author's customary long-windedness. Robert Goldsborough's second pastiche of Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe mysteries, *Death on Deadline* (Bantam, $3.95), falls short of his first (and both are inevitably pale compared to the originals), but it's a brave try nonetheless.

Daphne du Maurier's 1957 bestseller, *The Scapegoat* (Carroll and Graf, $4.50), is beautifully written and highly involving (of course) but based on the utterly implausible premise that a man can take over his double's life, totally without preparation, with no one noticing the difference save the family dog. Tough to swallow even from a writer as persuasive as Du Maurier.

The year 1988 marks the centennial of Jack the Ripper's heinous crimes, and among the volumes commemorating the occasion is a reprint of Marie Belloc Lowndes' 1913 novel *The Lodger* (Academy Chicago, $4.95), an early example both of Ripper fictionalization and of pure psychological suspense. The Ripper here is called the Avenger and, given Edwardian restraint about such matters, no mention is made of his victims' profession. After three quarters of a century, this is still quite a powerful novel, and it is obvious why it appealed to Alfred Hitchcock, who began his career as a suspense specialist with the 1925 silent film version.

Latest nonfiction account of history's best-known serial killer is Terence Sharkey's *Jack the Ripper: 100 Years of Investigation* (Ward Lock, $24.95). Though somewhat overpriced (as imports often seem), it offers a well written brief survey of the crimes and considers each of the main suspects (Montague John Druitt, George Chapman, the Duke of Clarence, and about a dozen others), providing not a definitive decision but a probability percentage of each. Donald Rumbelow's *The Complete Jack the Ripper* (1975), frequently cited by Sharkey, remains the best thorough reference on the case.

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AGAIN, THANKS TO YOU —A PARTY

On May 9th of this year, Davis Publications held a luncheon at New York's Tower Suite to honor the 1987 Mystery Writers of America Edgar nominees for best short story and the winner of the Robert L. Fish Award for best first mystery short story—and to present the EQMM Readers Award. Unfortunately, not all the honorees were able to attend, including EQMM Readers Award second runner-up, John F. Suter, but photographer Jane Jewell captured some select candids of those who were there. Reflected on this page is the joy taken in giving the EQMM Readers Award by publisher William F. Battista and in receiving it by Writer Robert Barnard—and Ann Bayer, first runner-up—joy made possible by you, our responsive readers.

Robert Barnard receiving the 1987 EQMM Readers Award from William F. Battista for "The Woman in the Wardrobe" (EQMM, 12/87). Later in the week, Mr. Barnard won a scroll from MWA for "Breakfast Television" (EQMM, 1/87) and a few weeks later "The Woman in the Wardrobe" was named best mystery short story of 1987 by Mystery Readers International.

Ann Bayer, first runner-up for "A Pleasure To Deal With" (EQMM, 11/87), accepts her citation.

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Clark Howard, winner of the first two EQMM Readers Awards (1985 and 1986), mugs for the camera as his wife Judith looks on.

Louise and Robert Barnard. Louise provided the bibliography/filmography for her husband's appreciation of Agatha Christie, *A Talent To Deceive*.

MWA grand master Dorothy Salisbury Davis (see cover)

MWA president Mary Higgins Clark

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Davis president Joel Davis with Rose Dannay, whose husband collaborated as EQ

Mystery writer Shizuko Natsuki and agent Miyuki Suzuki

The winners

EQMM contracts manager Florence Eichen

EQMM subsidiary rights director Cynthia Manson with George Baxt, 1987 Edgar nominee for "Stroke of Genius" (EQMM, 6/87)

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1988 EQMM READERS AWARD

In 1988, we published 157 stories in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—157 stories by 91 different authors (the few pseudonymous stories counted as by their non-pseudonymous authors). The difficulties in choosing one favorite of all these is certain, but so is the fun and "the courage of" the choice. *We* always vote—just once, we promise—if only to experience the problem of deciding and to compare our choice with yours. How *do* you impartially choose a favorite child among so many? Hardly a Sophie's choice, but one of some consequence just the same.

As in previous years, the indices in the June and this Mid-December issue should prove helpful if you are not already sure of your vote. We would love to see the story that had the most impact on you win an overwhelming vote for the author—as has always been the case with this award—so do vote accurately so that your vote will count. On page 90, write in the name of the story and its author in the space provided. If you can't recall a story by either title or author, describe the story line as briefly as possible and, if you can, the issue in which you think it appeared.

Vote for one story only and send this page from the magazine as your ballot to the address on page 90 by December 31. Photocopies or ballots listing more than one choice will be disqualified.

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The EQMM Readers Award-winning story will be announced in the May 1989 issue. If you would like to learn the results of the voting before the May issue goes to subscribers and newsstands, send a standard-sized envelope with your name and address (include it with your ballot, if you like) and you will hear back from us by late January.

My selection for the 1988 EQMM Readers Award is:

Mail to: The Editors
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

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Things were not going well for George. The truth was, he had invested unwisely, and with the notion that his wife's inheritance constituted the ultimate collateral. Finally, in desperation, he suggested that Helen ask the lawyers what might be done now . . .

A SOUND INVESTMENT

by MONICA QUILL

When Helen finally inherited the money, it would be the solution of all his difficulties. God knows they had waited long enough. When her father died, George had helped his mother-in-law arrange her affairs, and had realized for the first time how much money Helen would come into.

Helen seemed surprised he was surprised. "Daddy was very successful."

"So was your mother's father."

"I know." She looked at him, then went back to her book.

In the meantime, all the money went to Helen's mother, who, it turned out, had the health of an ox. Fifteen years had gone by since George first learned the size of Helen's eventual inheritance and they had yet to see a nickel of it. Mrs. Wick had open-heart surgery, which strengthened her to bear the other expensive ailments awaiting her. Not that the expense mattered. There was more than enough money for the old lady to be treated for every known disease. But while she survived, Helen had nothing. And things were not going well for George.

The truth was, he had invested unwisely, and with the notion that Helen's money constituted the ultimate collateral. Finally, in desperation, George suggested that Helen ask the lawyers what might be done *now*.

"What do you mean?" Helen demanded.

"It seems a shame you have to wait for—"

"George, stop it! Surely you cannot expect me to wish my mother ill."

"Of course not," George said. "But it has to be very tempting for

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the lawyers, darling. An ailing old woman and all that money. Couldn't—"

"Must we talk of money?"

"I wish we didn't have to."

She sighed. "What's wrong?"

Like a fool, he told her. When he first invested in Subliminal Features, Helen had shaken her head and quoted her father to the effect that a fool and his money are soon parted. (She seemed to think the remark had originated with him.) But George was sure the language lessons encoded on tape along with rock music would sweep the market. The professor whose idea it was was enthusiastic and a colleague, an economist, had prepared a flow chart. Profits were projected to begin before the first year was out. But the only thing Subliminal Features produced was debt. However great an idea, they had thus far been unable to market it effectively. Somewhere in a warehouse were five hundred thousand cassettes containing rock music and encoded lessons in German, Spanish, and French. It was imperative that he get his hands on sixty thousand dollars soon or Subliminal Features would be dead.

"Good money after bad," she said. It was her father speaking.

George went to Briarly, Mrs. Wick's lawyer, and told him his wife was concerned. "Helen doesn't think her mother is gaga, but her mind is not what it was."

"I hadn't noticed."

Briarly was almost as old as Mrs. Wick, which made it difficult to make the point George wanted to make.

"Could Helen be given power of attorney, do you think?"

"I have power of attorney," Briarly said. He worked his mouth, which seemed to have gone dry from lack of use.

"Can nothing be done?"

"In what way?"

George decided to be blunt. "We need money, damn it. Badly. That's why I've come."

"For a loan?"

The old bastard was enjoying this, George realized. He got a grip on himself. "I *told* her there was no use."

Briarly winced as he got to his feet. Arthritis, probably, George thought. Served the old coot right. "You just tell Helen that she will one day have a great deal of money."

"She already knows that," George said.

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"Does she want to borrow money?"

"Against her inheritance, yes."

Briarly looked at George. "Maybe a banker would lend her money on that basis."

George had been to bankers and every one had turned him down, but that was because of what they thought of Subliminal Features. "She wants to borrow from the estate," he said to Briarly.

The old lawyer shook his head. "There is no estate so long as Emilia Wick is alive."

Mrs. Wick was ensconced in the Meadowbrook Manor Communal Residence at an annual cost that, in his present circumstances, made George seethe. But he wouldn't have begrudged the old girl twice that amount if only Helen could have some money now.

Having failed with Helen and with Briarly, not to mention eight bankers, George decided to go to his mother-in-law directly—not something he relished doing. Mrs. Wick had never liked him and made no secret of her view that even now Helen would be better off without him.

She was strapped into a wheelchair and had her denture in one hand and the remote control of her TV in the other. The sight of her son-in-law brought a frown rather than a smile. She motioned him to a chair, on which was a bedpan fastidiously covered with a cloth. He put the pan on the floor somewhat noisily and Mrs. Wick turned the sound of the television several punishing decibels higher.

The soap opera lasted an hour and was followed by another. George sat through both, pretending interest—not that Emilia noticed or cared—rehearsing what he would say to her. Briarly was right—she was not gaga. Her mind was alert and sharp. If she wanted to settle an amount of money on her daughter now, her lawyer would have no choice but to follow her wishes.

A game show came on and Mrs. Wick snickered with pleasure. "I want to talk with you," George said earnestly and she did not shush him as she had before. "It's about Helen." Mrs. Wick fixed a birdlike eye on him. "She made a bad investment and is rather deeply in debt."

"Her, too?"

"What do you mean?"

"She told me you lost a bundle of money on some stupid scheme."

"Did she ask you for money?"

The denture she had put back in her mouth during the second

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soap opera made her smile seem almost sinister. "It wouldn't matter if she did. It was only after my father died that I received any of *his* money."

His mother-in-law's eyes were fixed on him and he had the unsettling feeling she could read his thoughts. He smiled reassuringly, wondering how physically strong she really was. If only he could think of some way to ease her into the next world painlessly, he was sure Helen would not find the loss irreparable. After all, she rarely visited her mother now. All these aging people depressed her too much.

George looked at the pillow on his mother-in-law's bed and imagined holding it over her face while she slipped into eternity, thinking of it as a means of reunion with her husband, her parents, all her departed friends. Looked at in that way, it seemed a favor he might do her.

A nurse came and put Emilia to bed and George got up to go.

"Could you get her earphones for that set?" the nurse asked him in the hallway. "She won't turn it down."

George stared at her. She might have been a co-conspirator. "I'll bring a set tomorrow," he said.

He bought a headset on his way home and that night worked on it at his workbench in the basement. The idea was simple—what made it difficult was making what he intended to happen look like an accident. The headset was an import, probably assembled on boats in the Hong Kong harbor. An uncovered wire pressed to the ear. The current at Meadowbrook would be more than sufficient. A little more work and he was sure they would lock onto her head, explaining why he had been unable to remove them.

"That's very nice of you, George," Helen said the next morning.

He lifted his shoulders humorously. "I might be old myself someday."

At Meadowbrook, he showed the nurse at the reception desk what he had brought for Mrs. Wick.

"Thank God."

Emilia listened to his explanation and looked at the headset warily. "Show me how it works, George."

"Of course." Later he would use the attachment in his pocket to connect the headset to a wall socket. Now he plugged it into the

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television and put it carefully on his head. It was like shutting out the world. Too late, he remembered what he had done. The headset locked in place. Emilia smiled at him as if from the other side of glass and then her hand moved on the remote control. The sound struck his ears like cymbals slamming together, then rose higher, his mind seeming to soar with the sound to new pinnacles of pain and madness. He tried to tear the set off, but it only gripped his head more securely while an arthritic finger pushed the volume higher and higher.

Eventually he was given a room on the next floor, where he could be watched around the clock. He was young for Meadowbrook, but seemed somehow older, because his mind was gone.

And though his hearing was impaired—maybe *because* it was—he developed a fondness for the rock music his wife brought him, and a night nurse swore she had heard him speaking German in his sleep.

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a prize-winning story by

TAKASHI ATODA

Takashi Atoda was born in Tokyo in 1935. To date, he has written three novels and over 400 short stories. In 1979, he won the Naoki Award for an anthology of short stories, Napoleon Crazy, *and the Mystery Writers of Japan Award for "The Visitor."*

Her visitor was a middle-aged woman she recognized at once. Makiko gave her the noncommittal smile she reserved for inferiors and looked her over coolly. Everything had to be done coolly, as befitted a well brought up person like herself.

The woman craned her neck to get a view of the kitchen. "Is your husband home . . . ?"

THE VISITOR

by TAKASHI ATODA

When the chimes rang to let her know that there was someone at the back door, Makiko Ukita was sitting at the table with the morning newspaper open in front of her, listening to baroque music. The headlines were charged with the rising value of the yen, an approaching typhoon, and yet more police corruption, but the story that held her interest was one about a kidnaping in Tokyo's Ota ward.

It was a little before ten in the morning. The living room was tastefully decorated in mauve and white and Makiko looked very beautiful in a light-brown dress. She stood up and looked in at Sachie, who was asleep in her crib in the next room, sucking her thumb and breathing deeply. The pale-pink curtain by the crib billowed gently in the breeze, and, tiptoeing over, Makiko closed the window.

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In the hallway, she stopped at the mirror on the wall and, patting her hair in place, she opened the door slightly.

"Yes?"

Her visitor was a middle-aged woman she recognized at once. Makiko gave her the noncommittal smile she reserved for inferiors and looked her over coolly. Everything had to be done coolly, as befitted a well brought up person like herself.

"Good morning, madam." The woman craned her neck to get a view of the kitchen. "Is your husband at home?"

"No, he's at work."

The woman was wearing a shapeless dress and was bow-legged and pigeon-toed. "I just happened to be in the area," she said in an almost apologetic tone.

Her name was Hatsue Kanzaki and Makiko had first met her when Sachie was born. Hatsue had been working at the hospital as an attendant, looking after the patients' needs and laundering their underwear and performing other menial tasks for a set rate. As Makiko's recovery had not been as quick as was hoped, she had employed Hatsue for quite some time. She seemed to go out of her way to look after Makiko and was much more accessible than the nurses. She had even looked after the newly born Sachie for a while at the beginning.

Although Makiko had felt grateful to her, there had been something about her which she could only describe as disagreeable and Makiko could not bring herself to like the woman.

After Makiko was released from the hospital, Hatsue had come to visit her, and suggested that she hire someone to help in the house. Makiko realized that her aim in coming to visit her was to get a job, and she refused. She and her husband could easily have afforded domestic help, but there were only the three of them living in the house and there was no need to employ anyone else to do the cleaning. And even if there were, Hatsue was the last person Makiko would have chosen.

Still, every few months, Hatsue would turn up at the door like this.

Now she just stood there with an affable smile on her face and showed no sign of leaving, so Makiko had no choice but to invite her in.

"Thank you. I can't stay long, though." She walked in cheerfully and took her shoes off, putting them neatly to one side. "Is Sachie asleep?"

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"Yes, but it will soon be time for her milk."

Hatsue looked in at the child from the living room. "Oh, look at her, sucking her finger like that. Isn't she cute? Can she speak yet?"

"A little."

"Really? And she isn't one year old."

"They say baby girls are quicker than baby boys."

"Yes, and she was such a strong child, even when she was first born."

It may have been only Makiko's imagination, but she seemed to stress the words "when she was first born." Makiko had suffered from a fever for some time after delivery and was unable to look after Sachie straightaway. There was always a possibility that it could prove fatal if the baby had contracted the illness, so Sachie had been put in Hatsue's care. Now it occurred to Makiko, not for the first time, that Hatsue felt she had some prior claim on the child because she had looked after her before her real mother could. It was probably quite subconscious on Hatsue's part, but it annoyed Makiko very much.

Makiko walked resolutely to the table and filled the teapot. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Thank you."

"Drink it while it's hot." A delicious fragrance wafted from the rose-patterned cups on the beautiful, wood-grained table.

"Thank you." Hatsue came and sat. "Sachie is a beautiful child."

"She can be very mischievous when she is awake."

"You should let her play freely, though. That is very important."

The morning sun shone in through the lace curtains onto the beige, leaf-patterned wall. Outside, the lawn could be seen, yellowing here and there, and there was a hint of the fragrant olive tree on the breeze.

Hatsue looked around her, and then dropped her gaze to her lap. She clasped her gnarled hands uncomfortably and Makiko saw that she was comparing her own miserable existence with Makiko's privileged lifestyle. She tried to visualize the kind of life the older woman lived. She had heard she was a widow and seemed to remember there being talk of her having a child. She must be about the same age as Makiko's wealthy mother, but here she was, still living from day to day, struggling to make ends meet. What could she think when she saw the way Makiko lived? No matter how friendly she may appear outwardly, there was no way of telling what malice lay beneath.

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Although externally Makiko was all smiles and graciousness, as was becoming of a woman in her position, inside, she was very much on her guard. "Did you have any particular reason in coming here today?" she asked.

Hatsue looked up. "No, I just happened to be in the neighborhood and I thought how cute Sachie must be by now. I can hardly believe how much she's grown. When I was looking after her, she never had much of an appetite—it was a terrible struggle to get her to take her milk."

There she was again, talking about the time when she looked after Sachie. Makiko frowned. She supposed it would be too much to expect a woman like Hatsue to understand a concept like delicacy. It was true that she had once been in the woman's debt, but she had already been paid for what she had done—paid rather more than she was due, at that. Maybe that was it. She had been paid so handsomely for her services that she could not forget about it and kept in touch just in case there was another opportunity to make some money.

"It must be very difficult for you to cope on your own," Hatsue said.

Ah, there it was. "Yes, if only I could find someone I could hire to help me with the housework."

Even as she spoke, Makiko could feel a malicious smile play on her lips. Now that she knew what the other was after, she would tease her a little.

Hatsue gave her a fawning look. "I have something that needs to be sorted out first, but if you could wait about a month—"

As Makiko had expected, she had sprung to the bait. But now that she knew what the aim of her visit had been, there was no need to continue the conversation.

"No," she said abruptly. "My husband and I have someone different in mind."

Hatsue's shoulders drooped and she looked at her lap again.

Makiko could not deny that she felt superior to a certain extent. After all, it was a fact of life that some people were guaranteed a comfortable life from birth while there were many others who, no matter how hard they worked, would never be able to do much more than subsist. A good example was the house she lived in. Just the land would be worth about a hundred million yen at the present rates, but they had received it from their parents as if it was their right. A woman like Hatsue could work all her life and still not manage to save a tenth of that. It may be unfair, but that was the

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way it was: these things were settled at birth. Makiko had no doubt that this would be the pattern for the remainder of her life, and that Sachie would follow in her footsteps. She had no idea how people who were not so well off lived or thought, but she supposed they must be envious of her, that their envy could approach hatred, and she guessed that this was why she found them unpleasant.

The two women sat together at the table, but they had nothing to talk about. "Are you still working at the hospital?" Makiko finally asked in an effort to break the embarrassing silence.

"No. The work there was becoming too hard for me."

"I see. What are you doing now?"

"I'm registered with a domestic agency. I can choose which jobs I want to take, and if I find the work too difficult, I can take time off."

"That sounds very nice," Makiko replied disinterestedly and looked up at the clock. It was almost eleven. At that moment, the baby awoke and cried out happily for her mother.

"Ah, she has woken up at last! I bet she needs to have her diaper changed." Hatsue jumped up and started toward the bedroom, happy to escape from the awkwardness between her and Makiko. Left alone, she would probably have started to change the child's diaper, but Makiko was not going to have any of that. She hurried to the other room and bent down over the crib.

"Have you woken up, then? Are you hungry? Is that why you called for your mummy like that? You're late for your feed, you know," she said.

Recognizing her mother, Sachie called out again happily and rocked the crib.

Hatsue peered over Makiko's shoulder. "Look at her pursing her lips like that. I bet she *is* hungry. You go and prepare her milk and I'll change her diaper for you."

"No," Makiko snapped, reaching for a fresh diaper on the bureau and starting to change Sachie. It really was too much. Raising a child may not be easy, but at least it was a mother's privilege. Nobody else had the right to give her orders.

"Are you using a diaper service?"

"Yes," Makiko answered curtly.

"Oh, dear, look at that rash. You should really make her diapers out of an old cotton kimono."

"Nobody does that these days," Makiko muttered. Hatsue was making it crystal clear that she wanted a cushy job in a rich house-

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hold. The more she thought about it, the more Makiko realized how attractive this house must seem to someone in Hatsue's position. But she would never hire her. She did not want to spend the next few years listening to her boast about how she had looked after Sachie when she was first born, and there was no way she would leave Sachie in the care of such a rude, uneducated woman.

Hatsue was standing to one side, watching her eagerly, ready to spring to her assistance at the slightest opportunity. Makiko ignored her, and after changing Sachie's diapers carried her to the kitchen to prepare her milk.

"You are not breast-feeding her, then?"

"No, when I had the fever, they gave me an injection to stop the milk—you know that."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten. It's too bad. Breast-feeding is best for a child, you know."

"That's not true. Milk formulas have improved tremendously."

The telephone rang and Hatsue reached out to take the milk and child from Makiko.

"I'm fine," Makiko said, carrying Sachie to the phone with her. To her amazement, Hatsue followed her into the hall and watched her as she tried to feed Sachie with one hand and take the phone in the other.

What could she be thinking of, following her around like this? Whose house did she think this was? Visitors should follow a certain set of rules. She did not know what kind of rules they had in the slums, but in a fine house like this there was a set etiquette to follow.

The phone call was from the bank to inform her that there had been a deposit made to her account.

"One million, two hundred, and sixty-eight thousand yen," she repeated automatically without thinking. Even as she spoke, she felt a thrill of fear run down her spine. Hatsue had been listening and must have heard her quote the amount.

When she put the phone down, she saw that Sachie had finished her milk. Usually, she put her in the carpeted playroom after her meal and let her play with her toys, but she didn't know what Hatsue might try if she had the chance, so after she burped Sachie she sat her firmly on her lap and held her protectively.

Hatsue fluttered around them, commenting on how pretty Sachie's eyes were and how rosy her cheeks were. Makiko felt that if this went on for much longer, she would go mad. No matter how cross

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she looked, Hatsue did not take the least notice and finally Makiko could stand it no more. "I have got some things to do, Hatsue," she said, "so if you don't mind—"

Hatsue looked up at the clock and said, "Oh, I am very sorry. Sachie is so adorable that I lost track of the time."

"It's a pity I don't have any more time," Makiko said.

"I am sorry to have bothered you." Hatsue stood and took Sachie's hand. "Byebye, Sachie."

"Goodbye," Makiko said, leading her to the door.

"Goodbye," Hatsue said, putting on her shoes. "Thank you for the tea." She gave Makiko a short bow, then, waving to Sachie again, she stepped outside and Makiko closed the door behind her.

Makiko put Sachie in the playroom, then sat down on the sofa, exhausted from the tension of the woman's visit. She could not shake off the feeling of unease that she felt. What did the woman want? She had said that she just happened to be in the neighborhood, but ten in the morning was early for that. Maybe she did just want a job as a housekeeper, but for some reason Makiko began not to think so.

She picked up the newspaper she had been reading and her glance fell on the report of the kidnaping.

No, she couldn't—

Still, there was no telling what a person like that might do if she were desperate enough. Maybe she had called to let Sachie get used to her. And now she thought about it, Makiko realized that Hatsue had seemed intensely interested in the telephone call from the bank.

A black river ran under a grey sky.

Makiko recognized many of the people on this bank. For some reason they were all wearing colorful, high-fashion clothes by such designers as Issey Miyake and Ungaro and they were all looking toward the opposite bank and calling out.

The black water flowed by in high waves, but through them she could glimpse people on the opposite bank.

Sachie was there.

Hatsue Kanzaki was holding her in her arms, her face devoid of all expression. There was a crowd of people jostling around her and among them Makiko noticed an old tramp woman with a dog she often saw at the train station and the maid her father had dismissed after he caught her stealing.

Makiko desperately threw a wad of money toward the opposite

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bank, but the notes fluttered down to settle on the black water and be carried away.

Then she realized she was dreaming and that all she had to do was open her eyes and everything would be all right, but somewhere in the back of her mind was the idea that if she watched a bit longer she would learn what Hatsue's plan was.

Suddenly the back-door chimes rang and the dream was shattered.

It would appear that she had curled up on the sofa after putting Sachie in for her afternoon nap and had dropped off herself.

"Yes?" She hurried to the door, stopping to look at Sachie, asleep in her crib.

The chime rang again.

She opened the door gingerly, leaving the chain in place, half expecting the caller to be Hatsue, back again for some sinister reason of her own.

But it was not Hatsue—it was a stocky man in a grey suit.

"Yes?"

"I am from ——— police station," he said, and showed her his identification.

"You're a policeman?"

"That's right."

Ever since Hatsue's visit, she had had a premonition of something terrible happening, and hearing that this man was a policeman made her pulse race.

She removed the door chain and let him in. "What can I do for you?"

"Are you the lady of the house?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Makiko Ukita?"

"Yes." Makiko watched the detective tensely.

"Do you know a woman named Hatsue Kanzaki?"

"Yes."

He looked around the elegant kitchen. "What is your connection with her?"

"I met her about a year ago when I had my child. Mrs. Kanzaki was employed at the hospital as an attendant and she looked after me."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"What about after you were discharged?"

"She has come to visit me here several times."

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"Oh? Why?"

"I don't know, I suppose—"

"Because she doesn't know anyone else in Tokyo and you are the only friend she has?"

"Is that what she said?"

"No, not her."

"Actually, we were not at all close. She looked after me for about ten days in the hospital, then she seemed to want me to employ her here."

"But you didn't?"

"No. I can cope adequately on my own. I told her so quite clearly."

"Is that your only connection with her?"

"Yes. What has she done?"

The detective did not answer. Instead he asked: "When was the last time she came here?"

"This morning."

"*What?* Really? What time was this?"

"It was about ten o'clock."

"What time did she leave?"

"Around eleven o'clock. She was here for about an hour."

"Where was she going from here?"

"I don't know. She didn't say."

"Did you ask?"

"No."

"Was there anything strange about her manner?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Please think carefully—are you sure she didn't give you some clue as to where she would be going from here?"

Makiko thought, but she could recall nothing.

"No, she just made a lot of fuss about Sachie—that's my baby."

"Is the child all right?"

When he said this, Makiko thought her heart would stop.

"Yes." But, stopping to ask him to wait, she rushed to the bedroom to check. Sachie was lying with her thumb in her mouth just as she was the last time Makiko had checked on her. Makiko felt her cheek, which was warm to the touch, and went back to the kitchen where the policeman was waiting. "She's fine. She's sleeping."

The detective apologized for alarming her, then said: "She didn't ask you to lend her money or anything?"

"No."

"What was she wearing?"

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"A dress with a design of morning glories on it, brown shoes. She carried a black handbag. Please tell me, has Mrs. Kanzaki—?"

"May I use your telephone, please?"

"Of course."

The detective sat by the phone and dialed a number. He soon appeared to be calling the local police station.

"Hello, yes. Hatsue Kanzaki called at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kazuhiko Ukita this morning. She arrived at about ten o'clock and chatted with Mrs. Ukita for about one hour before she left. No, she has no idea why she came or where she went after that, but I think it's likely that she came here to try to borrow some money to make her getaway. She probably couldn't bring herself to ask for it outright and went away empty-handed. The suspect was wearing a flower-patterned dress, brown shoes, and carrying a black handbag—the same as when she disappeared two days ago. Of course, we can't rule out the possibility of suicide."

Makiko stood in shock as he ended his conversation. Getaway, suspect, suicide—those words belonged in newspapers and magazines, none of them had anything to do with the kind of world she lived in.

"What has Mrs. Kanzaki done?" she pleaded.

"She's the suspect in a murder case."

"Who do you think she killed? Why?"

"Do you know anything about her family?"

"No, nothing. She mentioned that she was a widow—"

"That is correct. She also has a daughter, a real little flirt. She will move in with a man, only to have him leave her when he finds someone else, then she soon moves in with another man. You must know the type."

"Yes."

"Well, Hatsue killed her daughter's child. We arrested the daughter on another charge two days ago and she told us she thought her mother had killed her baby. We searched Hatsue's apartment and found the bones of a baby in a plastic bag buried in the garden. As soon as Hatsue learned that her daughter had been arrested, she went on the run."

Makiko felt the dread build up inside her. Maybe Hatsue hated all babies, and if Makiko had taken her eyes off Sachie for a moment this morning—

The detective continued. "Her daughter had come to stay at Mrs. Kanzaki's apartment when she was very pregnant, but the day after

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she had the child she was gone somewhere again. Hatsue couldn't raise the baby on her own, and probably thought that even if she tried it wouldn't come to much. So she killed it. This was last fall."

Makiko gave a weak cry.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Ukita?"

"Yes, but—"

"What is it?"

Makiko was afraid to hear what the detective might tell her, but she couldn't stop herself from asking.

"Was the baby she killed a boy?"

"No, it was a girl."

"You said that it happened last autumn, but when exactly?"

"Let me see. It had to be sometime around the seventh of October—the day the child was born. Why do you ask?"

"It's nothing."

Makiko felt dizzy—it was all she could do to remain on her feet.

"Thank you very much for all your help," the detective said. "I may be back to talk to you again, but in any event if Hatsue Kanzaki should try to contact you, please get in touch with me." He gave her a card with his name and phone number.

It seemed to take forever before he left, but once he was gone Makiko hurried into Sachie's room. In the soft light of afternoon, she could feel the abyss of hell opening before her.

She stood and looked at the baby, and as she did so she thought she could see a resemblance between her and Hatsue. That would explain why she had come to visit her this morning instead of trying to get out of town ahead of the police—and why she had behaved as if she had the right to touch the child.

Her Sachie had been born on October eighth, and the more she thought about it the more convinced she became that the bones found in Hatsue's garden belonged to the child she had borne.

Couldn't it be that a narrow path had opened to allow someone from the underprivileged class to sneak over to this side of the divide?

Couldn't it be that there in the middle of the crib, sleeping peacefully as if greedy for its share of life, lay—the visitor?

—translated by G. Frew

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Amazing that the four had found one another as they had. That they'd been able to help birth one another's dreams . . .

JOYRIDE

by JAMES SALLIS

We dump the bodies in a ravine outside town, have some drinks at a roadhouse, and buy sixpacks at a Circle-K for the ride home. None of us knows the others' names.

We ride along silently for a while, sipping at beers and popping new ones, as dark comes down. There's country music, kind of loud, on the radio. Finally, the driver reaches over and turns it down.

"When I was a kid, not more than nine or ten," he says, "there was this girl down the block I always played with. Donna was her name—Donna Sue. I don't remember who made it up, but we always played the same game. Play-play, we called it—play-play number one. She was a beautiful princess and I was her wicked uncle. I had stolen her from her parents, kidnaped her. They'd never see her again, or she them. And in the meantime she'd learn to love me instead."

He hands me an empty can and I trade him a full one for it.

"You think you can fall in love that young?" he says, then shrugs. "Oh, who cares?" He takes a long swallow. "But I been most of my life trying to find again what I had that year—the excitement, the sense of controlling it all. Picking up women in bars or laundromats and pretending I'd kidnaped 'em. Even had a few I got to know real well who'd kinda go along with the gag. Never thought it would really happen, though." He holds up his can in a toast. A blade of light slashes through the car. "Best day of my life, gentlemen."

We come around a curve into a traffic jam, cars as far as you can see. He pulls us across three lanes, horns and brakes screaming close behind, up onto the shoulder, then down the embankment to a service road.

He pulls into a 7-Eleven. "Might as well stop for more beer since we're here."

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"What's all this?" he asks at the counter as we pay, nodding back toward the tieup.

"Accident, they tell me. Say there's bodies all over the road up there a ways. Always say that, though. That'll be twelve ninety-three. Don't need no gas?"

"Not this time."

"Ain't sold no gas all day long. Just beer and cigarettes and a sandwich or two and them girlie magazines there. Here's your change, and I thank you. Drive careful, now."

Two teenage girls are hanging around the Coke machine outside.

"You girls need a ride?" the driver asks.

They shake their heads, looking at one another. Both wear tight shorts and men's shirts tied at the waist.

"Anything else you *do* need?" Driver says.

The girls giggle at one another.

We climb back in the car, run the service road a few blocks, and eventually get back on the interstate. We pop new, cold beers and sit watching lights stream by. Almost no traffic up here above the jam. A few cars going the other way, away from town.

"We were dirt poor," one of the guys in the back seat says after a while. "Lived in one room, first I remember. A garage apartment, I think. I remember trees, stairs. Friday nights my old man—I think he was my old man, anyway—would come home late and drunk. I'd get put in the bathroom, in the bathtub with my pillow and blankets and all. And out there I'd hear the old lady hollerin' and beggin' for him not to hurt her. He'd rape her's what he'd do. Have her right there on the floor, on the kitchen table, wherever. Never touch her otherwise. Then later on he'd come in to take a piss and she'd still be out there cryin'. Hey, you guys think about getting something to eat?"

"*I* could do with something."

"Yeah, let's chow down."

"Sounds good."

Driver edges over into the right lane, scouting the roadside.

"I was, I don't know, twelve or thirteen maybe when he left," the guy in the back seat goes on. "I always *was* sorry I didn't have a chance to get to know him. The old lady run off not long afterward. Some guy she met at church or something."

"Burgers, or what?" Driver asks.

"Mexican?"

"Whatever."

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"Lotsa help," Driver says.

We wind up at Denny's. Half a chicken, Mexican plate, soup and salad, coffee and pie. A cop at the counter is asking questions about the bearded young man and scantily clad girl at one corner booth. He drinks five cups of coffee, heavy cream, before his radio goes off. Possible homicide, Main and Tenth.

"Death," I tell them. "It always fascinated me. At age eleven, I killed my first bird, and cried for hours. The next day I killed a squirrel, a week later a deer. I began reading poetry about the same time—Donne and all the others. Pavese: *Death will come, and will have your eyes.* I wanted no other lover."

I look about, at their unknown faces, and know they understand. Amazing that we've found one another as we have. That we've been able to help birth one another's dreams. I pay, and we again mount the car. Hang on, Driver says. He tears past stop signs onto the interstate. Red moon in the sky. Billboards advertising condominiums, topless clubs, social services, Jesus, abortion, groceries.

"There's a story we haven't heard still," I say.

The other guy in the back seat lifts his head. He has longish hair, a trim moustache, fair skin. Trusting eyes.

"Nothing like what *you* guys have, I'm afraid," he says. "No great obsession or the like. Just a premonition, a vision I've carried with me from earliest childhood. The reason all your faces were familiar when we first met."

The rest comes in a rush, like ants from a damaged hill.

"Four men in a car, two bodies left well behind. Three of the men have lived their dreams, fulfilled their lifelong fantasies today. The other is about to."

He drains his can and rolls its coolness along his forehead.

"The car is coming into a sharp curve. A limousine pulls alongside, then suddenly in front. Control is lost. No one survives."

I feel Driver haul us hard to the right and look around, ahead, in time to see the car pull into our lane. It's a long limo, blue as the sky, our sudden horizon.

"Q"

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A goodly Baytown murder mystery in blank verse from William Bankier . . .

TWO BARDS WITH ONE STONE

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Come, gentle reader, bored with daily trials
And tribulations, let your mind fly free
To Baytown—tranquil city made of dreams,
Where recently was murder done. Not once
But twice within a week the killer struck,
Choosing each time a man connected with
The Baytown Thespians. Was this a fluke?
Or did the second killing match the first
As howling dog doth echo midnight scream?
Here was a problem sent to try Chief Greb,
Whose normal practice in this peaceful town
Tends more to traffic tickets and the like
Than dealing with a murder. Yet, in time
He made the mental leap, and solved the crime!

South of the bay, in rural countryside,
By apple orchards rimmed, a restaurant stands
Called Conlon's County Gardens. Here, most nights,
The massive parking lot is filled with cars
As Baytown's citizens converge to dine
On steak and fish-and-chips. But not tonight.
Row upon row of folding metal chairs
Confront a stage. The seats have all been sold
Despite the fact the *Baytown Banner* ran
A column called "Joe Conlon's Potpourri"
In which Joe Conlon wrote: "They mean to use
My parking lot to stage those awful plays

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By William Shakespeare. When I signed the deal,
I understood there would be music hall
With songs and jokes and dancing. Now it seems
We'll have to suffer through this boring siege
They call The Baytown Shakespeare Festival!"
Conlon's contempt for culture drew replies,
Strongest of which was Max Monroe's retort.
Maxim Monroe was new in town. He came
From Montreal, three hundred miles away—
An actor, poet, playwright of some class,
And a director, hired to mold the town's
Dramatic talent to the task at hand.
Max wrote a letter which appeared in print
A few days after Conlon's diatribe.
"Philistine attitudes," he wrote, "are sad
Whenever and wherever they appear,
But here we have an influential man
Who would debase the values of this town
To match his own, believing wealth and power
Render him safe from our antipathy.
Thus Conlon doth make cowards of us all.
But not of me." Monroe went on to say,
"From criticism, no man is exempt.
I'll do these plays, or die in the attempt!"

Running rehearsals caused Monroe great stress.
Being perfectionist, he tried in vain
To coax performances from players who,
In daily life, were teachers, shop clerks, or
Did drive a taxicab, or paint a house.
Worst of the lot was Peter Pilkington,
A handsome youth bedeviled by the curse
Of father's money. Thus young Pete was free
To go about with notebook and with pen,
An embryonic poet on the hoof,
Though publishers had never once seen fit
To print a word of what he wrote. Onstage,
Young Pilkington could roll his eyes and curse
And shake the painted scene with robust voice.
Playing the role of Hank in *Henry Fifth,*
He made a meal of each soliloquy,

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While Maxim Monroe tried in vain to shape
This energy into some sort of form
Approaching what the author had in mind.
Shaking his head at dress rehearsal's end,
The fierce director, facing Pilkington,
Cried, "God help Baytown, Harry, and St. George!"
This drew a laugh from the assembled cast,
But not from Pilkington, who walked away,
Simmering with a blood-red urge to kill.
Comfort was not far off. A pretty girl
Named Debra Foley went to Pilkington
And took his hand—not for the first of times.
She whispered, "Pay no mind to what he says.
Come to the Coronet, we'll drink some beer,
And soon we'll have no reason to recall
This rudeness. Peter, come along with me—
And never let the bastards grind you down.
Further to that," she told him, "let me say,
Bad dress-rehearsal means a groovy play."

Watching this bold departure from the stage,
The whole cast turned to Norman Foley, he
Whose wife had just abandoned him to go
And dally with another man. But Norm
Was cold as ice, or so he seemed to be.
Debra, his young school-teacher wife, was known
For her flirtatious manner, as was he
For his long-suff'ring tolerance. But, look—
Observe the glint of steel in Norman's eye,
As if his anger, honed to razor-edge
By years of her insensitivity,
Might yet be summoned forth to wreak revenge
On Debra or on Peter Pilkington.
Teresa Harper broke the silent spell,
Calling to those onstage from where she stood
Beside her table in the parking lot,
Where customers would enter and would pay,
Or claim their reservations. Terri called,
"You've got your problems! Boy, have I got mine!
I'm out here where the wind blows off the bay

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And sends my papers flying—ticket stubs
And reservation lists and programs, too!
Tomorrow night, when people will arrive
And pay their money, I'll need twenty hands
To hold my papers down!" Max Monroe said,
"You need a paperweight. Can someone bring
One of those weights we use to anchor flats
And give it to Miss Harper?" Someone did.
But when the weight was there, it was so large
And heavy, it was inconvenient.
Teresa's mother, Minnie, was close by,
Waiting to drive her daughter home. She said,
"The weight you need is on your study desk.
Bring it tomorrow." Terri said, "You're right—
The rock I found near Lake Ontario
Last summer as I walked along the beach.
The granite slab that's shaped just like a fist,
With fossil shells embedded in the wrist."

Picture the scene as op'ning night arrives,
With traffic on the Bay Bridge end to end,
Proceeding at a reverential pace
To Conlon's County Gardens. See the lights
Illuminating stark, uncurtained flats,
Before which Shakespeare's drama will be played.
No one is sure they'll do the play at all,
For this is Baytown, home of softball teams
And famous for its cheddar cheese. But not
Another Stratford, or a Central Park
Where Papp can work his magic. Sympathize
With these poor players, facing their ordeal.
To them, the risk is terrible. It seems
A little bit of hairy in the night.
Forward we go. Teresa's fist of stone
Is doing yeoman service as a weight.
Backstage, the actors turn to Max Monroe
For final words of confidence. And then
Norm Foley, Debra too, and Pilkington
And all the others take their mighty leap
Into the dark. The enterprise begun,
There is no place for them to cut and run . . .

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Somehow, the first performance staggers on
To end near midnight. Sparse, polite applause
Crosses the footlights. Thus the actors know
They bombed. The prompter Michael Kingdom's voice
Is wrecked from hours of calling out the lines
The cast could not remember. Hear him now:
"I'm hoarse, I'm hoarse," Mike Kingdom roars, "I'm hoarse!"
They all ignore him. Now the players turn
To beer and whiskey, and to sandwiches
Catered by Joseph Conlon at no charge—
A party for the cast on opening night.
Here for an hour, the mood is sensitive
As those left bloody succor those who bleed.
But alcohol brings inhibitions down
And soon Monroe's frustrations overcome
His tact. He turns on Peter Pilkington
And says, "If this were William Shakespeare's time,
You would be barred from Avon for the way
You butchered poor King Henry here tonight."
Pilkington gives as good as he receives—
At times it seems the two might come to blows—
Then Peter leaves the party with, guess who?
Yes, Debra Foley, Norman's restless wife.
Norman himself, somewhat the worse from booze,
Is less inclined to smile than times before.
"Damn it to hell!" He polishes off his drink
And goes with anger into that sweet night.
"Mother, let's go," Teresa Harper says.
She's tallied up her ticket sales, and now
Is feeling sleepy after two large beers.
Hatted and gloved and looking quite demure,
Old Minnie says, "The night is young, my dear,
And all the fun I think is yet to come."
This eighty-year-old lady has the fire
And energy of someone half her age:
"Go if you must," she says, "I mean to stay.
Now kindly pass the pretzel bowl this way."

Hour after hour, through the foul womb of night,
The Baytown Thespians caroused. They raved
And sang and ate and drank and told bad jokes,

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And danced the Cokey-Okey until dawn.
Morning's first light streamed over eastern hills,
Showing the tired revelers a sight
Of such consuming horror, none who saw
Would evermore erase it from their minds.
There on the ground, half hidden by a shrub,
Lay Max Monroe. His head was bathed in gore
As if some mad attacker had cut loose
And crushed his skull with a blunt instrument.
Nearby was Joseph Conlon, on his knees,
For he it was who stumbled on the corpse
And now was wiping blood from off his hands,
Using discarded programs for the task.
Suddenly pandemonium set in
With shocked performers running here and there,
Nobody sure of what they ought to do,
Yet knowing that some duty should be done.
Then Minnie Harper said, "You flock of geese,
I think it's time we sent for the police."
When Greb arrived, he sorted matters out
By ordering the actors from the scene
And sending them to sit before the stage,
Where recently the audience had sat.
Summoning Joseph Conlon, Greb began
At the beginning. He who found the corpse
Was known as one who hated Max Monroe.
Conlon opposed the Festival, while Max
Had told the town in no uncertain terms
What fools such men as Joseph Conlon be.
Nor was their argument a private fight—
They'd fought it in the pages of the press
For all to read, including our Chief Greb.
"You had your motive," Greb was heard to say
While Monroe's corpse was carried from the field,
"And like as not the opportunity
To strike the blow that killed him." "True enough,"
Said Conlon, "but I'm not the only one.
Pilkington hates Monroe as much as I,
If not more so. That boorish martinet
Destroyed poor Peter not so long ago,
Shafting him as a hapless amateur

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While all his fellow thespians looked on.
The fact of Monroe hammered to the ground
Is nothing more than Pilkington's revenge."
"Wait for a moment," Minnie Harper called.
The ancient lady sat on lip of stage,
Dangling her legs, as spry as half her age.
"You can't accuse poor Pilkington. He'd gone
While Max was still alive. I saw him leave,
As many others did. And not alone—
He left with Debra Foley at his side."
The other actors murmured their assent,
Thus proving Peter's alibi, until
A voice was heard to say sarcastically,
"He wasn't with my wife, I guarantee."
And there stood Norman Foley. "I took off
And followed Pete and Debra. As you know,
They've kept each other company for weeks
Throughout this whole production. But tonight
I told myself enough is now enough.
I followed in my car across the bridge
And caught them at the Coronet Hotel,
Where they were sitting down to have a drink.
Choosing my words, I made my meaning clear.
Peter would have his hands full fighting me
If this affair continued. Off he went—
No stomach, it would seem, for fighting duels.
As for my wife, I think it did her good,
Seeing me set to battle for my rights."
Foley made no attempt to join the crowd,
But sat him at the table where that night
Teresa Harper served as ticket clerk,
Distributing the programs. Then said Greb,
"So Pilkington has got no alibi.
From what you've said, the man had ample time
To drive back here and park his car and then,
Finding Monroe alive and in the dark,
To crush his skull." Here Greb produced a sigh.
"So Pilkington or Conlon, either one,
Had opportunity and motive. Now
Find me the murder weapon. It may serve
To link one certain suspect to the crime."

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Then from the chair by Terri Harper's desk,
A startled exclamation turned all heads.
Norm Foley called, "Unless my name is mud,
The weapon's here—and so is Monroe's blood!"

There on the table lay a fist of stone
Suitably formed to strike a lethal blow,
And sticky with the blood of him who died.
"Now we are making progress," Greb proclaimed,
Placing the weapon in a plastic bag,
Stowing it in the back seat of his car,
Locking the door and saying, "Let the lab
Do its analysis of Monroe's blood,
And of the gory stains adhering now
To this gross weapon. But I think I'll check
For fingerprints." "You're sure to find mine there,"
Said Minnie Harper not uncheerfully.
"Terri and I both moved it many times
Last night while selling tickets. So you see,
Unless you mean to charge me with the crime,
I'm not quite sure how fingerprints with help.
Besides, I'm sure the killer put on gloves,
Or wiped the handle clean when he was done."
Dusting the stone for prints, the Chief soon saw
Nothing remained, the handle was wiped clean.
Greb took the widow Harper to one side
And spoke to her in confidential tone.
"Minnie," he said, "I have to do my job,
And not let social niceties intrude.
Your daughter Terri's motive is quite clear.
When the deceased first landed here in town,
Lodgings were sought. He moved in at your house
On Bridge Street, where he stayed for quite some time,
And made himself extensively at home."
Minnie now said, "No need to stress the point.
Max and Teresa dated more than once
In the beginning, going out to dine—
Or see a movie or to walk the paths
Of Maple Park, next to my property."
"And then," Greb said, "Monroe deserted you—
Or should I say, your daughter—moving out

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To take a room in Baytown's Star Motel.
Snubbing Teresa, Max should have been warned
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

Picture the great celestial globe of Earth
In slow majestic orbit round the Sun,
Spinning out days while Baytown measures time
By light and darkness. Three days come and go,
With sunrise o'er the canning factory,
Followed by sunset past the Fair Grounds wall.
Not much has happened here—or so it seems.
The murder of Max Monroe is unsolved,
And life goes on—the play is still the thing,
With Shakespeare's greatest dramas being staged
On Conlon's County Gardens parking lot.
Minnie, the widow Harper, now appears
Wearing a bandage on a damaged hand,
Put there to treat a rather nasty burn
She suffered at her backyard barbecue.
As for Police Chief Greb, his questioning
Of Conlon, Pilkington, and Foley, too,
Produced no breakthrough. Every man professed
His innocence with such intensity
That Greb was left with noplace else to go
Except the house on Bridge Street, where he drove
On Monday afternoon, parking his car
Beside the curb. Then walking to the porch
He spoke to Minnie, seated on a bench,
The bandaged finger resting in her lap.
"Doing my duty, Ma'am," the lawman said,
"And having probed all suspects in the case,
I now must test Teresa's innocence."
"That I can guarantee," the mother said.
"Terri's in the kitchen, step inside.
My daughter hasn't got a thing to hide."

During the time the cop was in the house,
A pungent whiff of cat came from his car
And penetrated all the neighborhood.
Minnie deduced the reason for the smell.

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The right rear window handle wouldn't close,
Leaving an aperture through which stray cats
Entered and slept and had no fear of Greb,
This easygoing man without much drive
To chase a cat, or chase down anything.
Now as the summer afternoon did wane,
Pete Pilkington came walking down the street,
Pausing outside the Harper house, his face
Was frozen in a mask of bitterness.
Shaking his fist at Minnie on the porch,
He raised his voice and "Listen here!" he said.
But Minnie hushed him, running to his side,
"Don't tell the world," she whispered, "just tell me!"
Tell her, he did—the actor was incensed
At having accusations laid on him
For murder that was not his work at all:
"Please, Minnie Harper, now confess your guilt,"
Said Pilkington. "I saw you on the night,
There in the shadows, waiting for Monroe.
I saw you deal the blows, using the stone
You'd taken from the table. And I saw
You put it back. Ah, yes, I do confess
I'd come to finish Max, but you were first.
You did the job that I had meant to do.
When it was done, your gloves were stained with blood.
I know this, for while walking recently
In Maple Park, I chanced to peer across
And saw you placing on your barbecue
The bloodstained gloves. You even burned your hand,
So anxious were you then to thrust them in
Upon the white-hot coals. But as for Max,
Why did you do it?" Minnie gave a shrug.
"Because the man was such a total boor.
Everyone took his insults, even you.
I'd heard enough. But worse, he stayed with us,
Seduced my daughter, and then took his leave.
For that, he had to pay the price. And now,
I'll thank you, Peter, keep this to yourself."
"I won't," he said, "as long as Captain Greb
Is treating me as Suspect Number One.

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To save myself I think I'll go downtown
And tell the Captain what you just told me."
Then, as the sun went down and skies turned dark,
Pete wandered on his way through Maple Park.

The lifeless body of Pete Pilkington
Was found next morning underneath a shrub
In Maple Park. They called in Captain Greb,
Who saw at once this crime was on a par
With Maxie Monroe's murder. Save one thing—
No murder weapon seemed to be at hand,
No bloodstained heavy object like the fist
He'd passed on to Forensic. Now Greb's face
Turned crimson as he realized his fault.
Going about, as busy as he was,
Investigating murder for a change,
The Captain quite forgot to follow through
And do what any cop is meant to do.

Old Minnie Harper was not too surprised
When Captain Greb came round a second time
And met her on the porch. "My daughter's out,"
The lady said. But Greb just shook his head.
"It isn't her," he said. "I think it's you
Who killed both men. I'll tell you what I've learned.
Forensic checked the stone that bludgeoned Max
And found his blood type on it. Ah, but wait—
Another person's blood was found there, too.
And this type matches Peter Pilkington's.
And thus it seems both victims, both these men,
Authors of much unpublished poetry,
These bards were clobbered by one granite fist."
"That's clever of you, Greb," the lady said.
"But tell me how this happened, since the stone
Was in police possession at the time
Of Peter's murder in the park." Greb smiled.
"You know as well as I do, don't play dumb—
I'd left the weapon in a plastic bag
There on the back seat of my car. That day,
When I was interviewing Terri here,

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I saw you through the window having words
With Peter Pilkington. He walked away,
And I stopped watching. But I'm sure it's true
You took the weapon from my car's back seat,
Reaching in through the window that won't close—
The fault is mine for leaving the thing there.
You followed Peter into Maple Park.
Killing him there, you brought the stone back here
And slipped it safe inside its plastic bag."
Now Minnie Harper nodded. "That's the truth.
I'm glad it's out. I had no other choice.
Once I killed Max, and Peter knew my guilt
And threatened to expose me, he was doomed.
Forgive me, Greb. Perhaps I should be hanged,
Or fried in the electric chair, or gassed
In that small chamber where the air is foul
As ever came from back seat of a car."
"Listen," Greb said, "I think you're round the bend—
And here is where this case is going to end."

Minnie's complete confession closed the file
On double murder—Baytown's very first.
As for her punishment, they locked her up
In red-brick institution, where the doors
Are locked, and all the windows tightly barred.
And here the medication she receives
Keeps her in check, and so she'll while away
The last few years remaining in her life.
Many have said the punishment doled out
In this case does in no way fit the crime.
All that aside, it can be said some good
Has sprung from evil. There on Bridge Street hill,
The Harper house now serves as a commune,
Where writers, poets, artists, and the like
All live together in an atmosphere
Of freedom, with Teresa holding sway.
Freed from maternal bondage, having fun,
She is benign executive in charge.
Shakespeare is relegated to the past
Where he belongs, as Joseph Conlon says.

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Various town events still have their place,
But not on such a major scale. Instead,
It's choir practice, high-school plays and sports,
All low-key ventures which can come and go,
Making no waves on Baytown's tranquil pond.
"Another festival?" the locals cry.
"You must be joking. We would rather die!"

ON OUR COVER

Dorothy Salisbury Davis has published over twenty books, the latest of which is *The Habit of Fear* (Scribners). A collection of her short stories, *Tales for a Stormy Night,* was published by Countryman Press in 1984. "The novels and stories of Dorothy Salisbury Davis may seem difficult to categorize," wrote Edward D. Hoch in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers,* "but they are all marked by an awareness of the stress of modern living on the individual, and by a deeply felt compassion for both victim and criminal alike which is rare in mystery fiction today." She is working on a new novel titled *The Deadly Seven.* She is a past president of the Mystery Writers of America and was named Grand Master by the organization in 1985.

Canadian-born stage, screen, and television actor Harry Davis has worked with directors Billy Wilder, Arthur Penn, and Elia Kazan *(Jacobowsky and the Colonel, America, America).* He won a Clio for his performance in a Pepsi Cola commercial. He is a member of the Actors Studio. Dorothy and Harry met at the Stage Door Canteen when Harry was serving as a sergeant with the Special Services branch of the U.S. Army. They were married in 1946.

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a *NEW* Rosetta Street story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"Rosetta Street's gone to the dogs, Mr. David," Morky remarked.

The policeman said innocently, "Quite a trick, seems to me. Any self-respecting dog wouldn't have the place. It's full of dishonest people and matching conduct—present company excepted, of course."

"Gerrof," Morky protested. "I mean the place is tame compared to what it was. Penny-ha'penny breaking-and-entering, bit of mugging here and there. I've seen the gutters of Great Northern Prospect running wiv blood, local firms going at it mob-handed, twenty or thirty a side, and the coppers getting pepper from both sides all the while, trying to break it up . . . "

QUOTATION GAMES

by JEFFRY SCOTT

In English villages, at least up to Victorian times, sages and elders tended to inhabit benches overlooking green or duck pond, if they weren't leaning on a fence to study crop and livestock form. That was what they did, it was what they were for—any fool knew that. But it was several centuries since the Rosetta Street neighborhood had been created by building on the village green and draining the duck pond. So Mr. Castell and Morky Morkwright could be found, six days out of seven, in the bus shelter opposite the Midland Bank in Great Northern Prospect. Supposedly public, the lean-to was their personal den.

They were an odd couple in every way, yet firm friends. Morky's dress suggested that he had plundered a thrift shop, working blind. Unwitting pioneer of designer stubble, he shaved once a week, before taking Sunday lunch with a married granddaughter at Peckham.

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Morky was a safebreaker back in the 1940s. The fact that he boasted only one finger and thumb on his right hand suggested that his act had needed work.

Mr. Castell, retired master of the Rosetta Street public library, always wore a blue pinstripe suit, pristine raincoat, and faintly mangy homburg hat. Half the district's kids, the ambitious half, came to Mr. Castell for help with schoolwork. Many of the other half cultivated Morky Morkwright because the old villain was a talking treasury of criminal lore. The pair lived interesting if static lives and picked up a surprising amount of general information. The triangle defined by Rosetta Street, Great Northern Prospect, and Cap-a-Pie Lane is noplace for informers. Mr. Castell and his chum Morky were well aware of it. All the same, Detective-Inspector Nick David enjoyed chatting with them.

Morky remarked, "Rosetta Street's gone to the dogs, Mr. David."

The policeman said innocently, "Quite a trick, seems to me. Any self-respecting dog wouldn't have the place. It's full of dishonest people and matching conduct—present company excepted, of course." His tone was so patently, teasingly insincere that Morky Morkwright grinned reluctantly while Mr. Castell sniffed dry approval.

"Gerrof," Morky protested. "I mean the place is tame compared to what it was. Penny-ha'penny breaking-and-entering, bit of mugging here and there. I've seen the gutters of Great Northern Prospect running wiv blood, local firms going at it mob-handed, twenty or thirty a side, and the coppers getting pepper from both sides all the while, trying to break it up."

Mr. Castell, who had the profile of a genial vulture, winked at Inspector David. "A sense of humor is supposed to be warping, but my money is on nostalgia."

Woman Detective Constable Brenda Diggs shifted restively—partly because she disapproved of such talk, and Morky in particular, on principle, but mainly because she disliked idle gossip and time-wasting. Moreover, her feet hurt and she wanted to sit down. The old duffers were sparely built, yet managed to fill the entire length of the bus shelter's bench, thanks to widespread garments and cunningly placed walking sticks and shopping bags. Nick David had arranged for Brenda to get out of uniform for a spell as temporary C.I.D. aide and she knew that she ought to be grateful, but he made it very hard to feel obliged, especially with her shoes pinching. He'd been chin-wagging here for close to twenty minutes.

Secretly, W.D.C. Diggs suspected Inspector David of being slightly

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crazy. Sometimes he talked—not exactly wildly, but it made no sense. Around Mr. Castell, another borderline loony, he tended to get worse: he and Castell were prone to skid into what amounted to a private language, though no slang nor foreign tongue was used.

Brenda sighed and checked her watch as meaningly as she dared. Nick David, pink-cheeked and deceptively schoolboyish, noted the gesture, smiled blandly, and failed to respond. Instead, he leaned against the corner of the shelter—she winced, since he affected silvery grey suits and she knew he was courting a dry-cleaning bill—folded his arms, and went back to teasing Morky Morkwright, luring the reprobate into ever more unseemly memoirs.

A car door slammed, making Brenda start. The car had been parked, illegally, beside the bus stop. Now it snarled away into the traffic stream, nearly mowing down a cyclist and causing a trucker to stand on his brakes. Brenda caught a glimpse of the driver and wished she was back in uniform and out of Nick David's control. She could have booked the fellow, Driving Without Due Care, and made him take a breath test.

Her male companions recognized the road-hog, too, reacting in character. Inspector David smiled vaguely, Morky Morkwright spat. "Cocky bastard, hope he hits a bus." Mr. Castell, with a vinegar-sipping grimace, remarked, "Higgins the Heathen, damn his eyes."

"Hawkins," Brenda corrected, "that was Harry Hawkins." And blushed, because Mr. Castell was giving her a pitying look as he said to Nick, "Hawkins on his birth certificate, but a Higgins all the same. And definitely a heathen, if not worse." Private language, she fumed—either your name was Higgins, or not. And in the case of Harry Hawkins, it wasn't.

Inspector David stared at the ex-librarian for perhaps half a minute. "Ah. Oh, yes, *Higgins*—'Song of the Strange Ascetic.' Does Harry Hawkins qualify, though? As I recall, the Higgins vices were fairly pallid by Rosetta Street standards."

Mr. Castell shrugged, sardonic, disappointed. "Then your recollection is at fault, my boy." As a teacher prompts a bright pupil, he added, "It's quite a long poem."

Nick's lips moved silently. Then he blinked and murmured, "Funny cash? Harry Hawkins? Live and learn."

Morky nudged Castell. Brenda could tell that Morky was out of his depth, as baffled as herself, but his instincts were sharper. "Give over, mate, no speaking out of turn. Start blabbing to coppers and the next chat could be with St. Peter, know what I mean?"

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Mr. Castell shrugged again. "Don't worry, Morky. Mr. David and I were exchanging literary notes, no more than that. Laying information against Harry Hawkins is a game for younger men."

Not wholly placated, Morky grumbled, "You remember that, then. Anyway, ol' Hawk would never monkey with funny money, counterfeiting's right out of his class."

To Brenda's puzzlement, the observation brought shared, covert amusement from Nick David and Mr. Castell.

"At last," she nagged as they moved away from the bus shelter. "With respect, sir, I thought we were supposed to be keeping watch for something—and we're running late now."

Nick, yellow forelock bouncing in time to his stride, gave her a sidelong glance. "We've done that bit, dear. The idea was to see whether Harry Hawkins went into the Midland Bank. Didn't I mention that earlier?"

"No, sir." Lips tight, Brenda felt her face warming again. He kept doing this, suckering her into thinking he was in the wrong only to emerge on the side of the angels. It helped, she mused grimly, if you took "need to know" to ridiculous lengths, telling your subordinate a vital fraction less than she needed.

Reading thoughts from expressions, Nick David halted, patting her arm. "Hey, if I'd told you, it wouldn't have worked half as well. Hawkins knows me by sight. But what he saw when he came out just now was three men deep in conversation while the woman in the group was anxious to get on her way, drag her boy friend off. So he didn't see *me*. The great trick about keeping obbo is to seem to be doing something else. If the target does see you, try to make him look away, want to discount you, forget you. Picking your nose generally does it, in my experience. Lots of coughing, at close range, is also recommended."

"That's gross—sir."

David chuckled and shook his head. "No, it's effective. But bad manners, I grant you." Tone changing, he went on, "What *is* Harry Hawkins up to, Brenda? First the bank thing—the manager assured me a Harry Hawkins has no account there. We'll check, but I bet our Harry didn't go in to get small change for a fiver. The manager doesn't know him, he simply looks for the name in the list of customers. So Hawkins has an account under a false name."

"Or he was banking for somebody else. Or his account could be under a company's name."

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"Harry Hawkins," Inspector David explained drily, "doesn't go in for companies. Too much paperwork. And no sane person would give him money to take across the room, far less to the Midland Bank in Great Northern Prospect."

Warily, Brenda asked, "What was all that Mr. Castell was spouting? Or is he just senile, and you played him along?"

Again Nick stopped walking. "Talking of bad manners, I'm guilty of them. Not done, keeping a colleague out of the joke. Castell, senile? Not a bit of it. Merely literate—there was a lot of that about when he was a boy. Before your time, and mine for that matter. Quotations, Brenda. All sorts of people had scores of them, just as people swap TV catchphrases and slogans today. They read, you see. Real books, page after page at a sitting."

His mild sadness stung W.D.C. Diggs into blurting, "*I* read books, thanks! And I can recite." She hoped he wouldn't challenge her. Nursery rhymes and a few snatches of Rolling Stones lyrics apart, it might be embarrassing.

Luckily, he simply nodded understandingly. "Mr. Castell was quoting G. K. Chesterton, a poem called 'Song of the Strange Ascetic.' For Castell's generation, the fun of quotations is to toss out a reference and see if your listener can follow it up. Like a verbal crossword puzzle with a touch of literary squash match. That's what he was doing back there, calling Hawkins 'Higgins the Heathen.' "

Evidently believing he'd made matters clear, Inspector David walked on. "Clear as mud," Brenda mumbled rebelliously.

"Coffee time," the Inspector decreed, steering her into a cafe around the corner from Rosetta Street Station. And when they were settled in a corner booth—Brenda easing her shoes off her heels under the table—he said, "Right, I'll start again.

"The Chesterton poem is about the type of man who has no conventional, old-style religion in his life or soul. But he's not really a heathen, because heathens have a good time. This fellow's milk-and-water, a very grey existence."

Brenda let the waitress get clear of their table, stirring her coffee for longer than it needed, before countering, "That doesn't sound like Harry Hawkins, sir. He lives it up—birds, booze, you name it."

"Now you're getting into the spirit of the thing," Nick approved. "I think Mr. Castell was struck by Chesterton's example being called Higgins, quite close to Hawkins. That, and the fact that Harry Hawkins and Higgins do have a match, in one verse of the poem."

"*Funny money?* But counterfeiting's a pretty sophisticated oper-

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ation, sir. Hawkins is just a standard heavy—rough stuff, he leans on people. Would he have the brains and skills to forge money?"

"Never in a million years," David replied promptly.

Crestfallen, Brenda said, "So it *was* all nonsense, you've been winding me up."

"Perish the thought. Mr. Castell doesn't talk nonsense. In his own odd way, he's an upright man and a concerned citizen who believes in law and order and helping the police. By the same token, that's a dangerous attitude to take around Rosetta Street. So when he does have a tip for me, Castell delivers it right under Morky Morkwright's bulbous nose. Everyone knows those two are inseparable. They also know Morky wouldn't tolerate a grass. So Mr. Castell plays quotation games and his cover is preserved."

Brenda pushed her cup aside. "Funny money, old Castell said. Or rather, *you* said it and he didn't disagree."

Nick, brushing fruitlessly at the long, dark, bus-shelter smear on his silver-grey sleeve, said, "Nearly right. Morky Morkwright got it wrong, as you did. Just as well, really. It took me a moment to remember the appropriate verse." Eyes half closed, he chanted, " 'Higgins is a heathen/And he drives the dreary quill/To lend the poor that funny cash/That makes them poorer still.' Not funny money, as in counterfeiting and forgery. Funny *cash,* as in usury, loan-sharking."

Brenda stared at him.

"Another little bird," Nick said, "a fee-taking one, tells us that Harry Hawkins, aka Higgins the Heathen, is awash with money and salting it away safely—opening bank accounts all over the manor, this informant claims. Now we have a shrewd idea of where aforesaid income originates."

Hardly listening, W.D.C. Diggs inquired, "Did he write a lot of poems, G. K. Chesterton?"

"Hundreds," Nick assured her solemnly. "The man was absurdly prolific, couldn't set pen to autograph album without descending into verse."

"And you remember it all."

For the first time, Inspector David faltered. "Steady on, dear. There's nothing special about having a knack for quotations. Some people can do sums in their heads or sing in perfect pitch. I can dredge up wodges of poetry. If you like Chesterton's verse at all, you're likely to know 'The Strange Ascetic.' "

"I think it's marvelous," Brenda told him. Then, shyly proud: "It's

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appropriate, isn't it? A Chesterton poem—and he wrote Father Brown, detective stuff."

"Well done," he said without a hint of patronage. "But at the end of the day, you may not think it's so marvelous, Brenda."

Her warm feeling began to erode. Inspector David's smile had a trace of sympathy. Glancing around—the cafe had emptied and the waitress was lounging by the cash register, communing with her Walkman—he leaned closer and lowered his voice.

"Harry Hawkins hasn't been arrested in years. He's a clever fellow. On the other hand, lending money at extortionate interest is very much against the law—so he *can* be nailed. It needs a lot of checking out and setting up. We want to find out how he works and who is on his books—correction, hooks.

"Ideally, it's an undercover operation. I'm thinking of a woman officer, fairly new to the manor, unknown to Hawkins, unlikely to be recognized by locals who've only seen her in uniform. You follow? She moves into a bed-sit, gets some nothing job, goes to Hawkins for money, and then plays it by ear.

"There will be back-up, but it has to be discreet, low profile, long distance. Frankly, we haven't the manpower to commit a big team for a long time. She'd be on her own until the final, crucial stage, and she would have to judge when that stage was imminent. She might get it wrong and that would be unfortunate. Hawkins not only hits women, he hits them harder than men because they can't hit back with equal power. Plus, he's highly anxious not to go inside again."

Nick leaned back. "I haven't quite decided who to approach. Of course, the problem might be solved for me. Someone might volunteer."

Brenda Diggs thought, with a touch of surprise, that for a right bastard of sorts, Inspector David was an attractive man. She thought that she was likely to regret her eventual decision, whichever way it went.

She knew what the decision would be, even before the thinking was over. Racking her brain, she did her best to match the Nick David method. "Fair enough, sir," she said. "I'm on. 'It is a far, far better thing I do—' "

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Carol had turned off the music and was responding to questions yelled to her from around the bar about the missing Lady Jane and the young man she was last seen with. "Vardon says not to expect anything, there's no crime, so cops won't be looking for him, but if a cop happens to see him he'll find out if he drives a tan car, if he picked up an old lady in a green jacket that Saturday night, and if so where he took her and so forth."

A guy said, "She's an old survivor, she's probly okay—"

Carol nodded. "Right. But I'd like to know for sure. If we *don't give a damn about an old pussycat like her, who will?"*

Sinnott/Twohy—the writer as dreamer. A smart publisher would do well to publish a fat collection of Robert Twohy's imaginative and perceptive stories about the Northern California scene, a number of them prize winners from the Mystery Writers of America and Mystery Readers International . . .

EVERYBODY GOES HOME

by ROBERT TWOHY

At Sirocco, near the S.P. depot, Sinnott sometimes picks up a scene or some dialogue he can use. He writes short crime fiction.

A Thursday in June, Carol asked if he'd seen Lady Jane anywhere the past week. He said no. Carol said that last Friday was the last anybody said they'd seen her.

Carol—short, trim, loose brown hair, round cheeks, been-around grey eyes that sometimes glint silver.

A guy down the bar asked if she'd checked Community? "Yeah, they don't have her." And she'd told Vardon? "Uh huh. He says he'll pass the word, and cops'll have their eye out."

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Vardon's the cop who stops in to let Parker or Carol know what's bugging decent people lately that freaks would be doing themselves a favor if they knocked off doing. Parker owns Sirocco and works days.

Sirocco is a blight that decent people wonder why cops don't close. Sinnott guessed it was because when they want to find a freak or a juvey runaway, they know where to start looking. But there are limits the craziness better not go beyond.

Carol calls the tune at night, sometimes on the brass gong standing midway along the back bar. Under the gong is a small steel hammer. Things start pushing the limits, *WWHHAAAANNNGGG-gg-gg-g-g-g!* Once is warning, twice is final— "Okay, that's it! You got two minutes to drink up!" They moan and sob, but she never bends the rule—five minutes after second whang, the dump is dark and they're in the street. She's Queen of the Night and the freaks know it.

Sinnott drank beer and thought of Lady Jane, who had come on the scene a few months ago. Somebody started calling her that and shortly it was her name. "Hey, Lady Jane, how you making it this fine furry evening?" She'd blink webby old eyes and grin, raise her glass—she never talked, couldn't or preferred not.

Always in the same outfit—lumpy green jacket with zippers and flaps and black-tape patches, clean old canvas pants, old blue tennis shoes. She'd be at a far table, sipping beer and lighting a Salem seconds after butting one out, soaking in the music and the baloney. "Have a beer on me, Lady Jane!" Sometimes she'd nod, but usually up went a palm—no, thanks. She paid her way and was a smoker, not a drinker. A few beers and a pack of Salems took her to midnight or so, when she'd be gone to wherever—some crummy room, the park, an abandoned car, maybe a storage shed with a broken lock. Nobody—including Vardon, it seemed—knew where she lived, her true name, or where she was from. She would sip and smoke and grin when hailed, and never say a word.

She hadn't been seen since last Friday.

Next Tuesday the word was, "Hey, jeer about Lady Jane?" No, what? "Sadday 'fore last Tanya saw her in a car with a young dude." Who's Tanya? "Tanya O'Flaherty. Use to come in here, moved to San Bruno a month or so ago. Y'knower, skinny little twit with short black hair."

The guy wasn't telling Sinnott, but the writer had an ear out. As

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one of the aging sports who stop in, he's not noticed when present or missed when not. Freaks know who's a freak and had spotted Lady Jane right away and given her a name. They didn't know Sinnott's name or care. Fine by him—he stopped in for scenes and dialogue, not fellowship. He was a watcher and listener, not a player.

Players talked around and across him and he learned what Tanya had seen.

Tanya O'Flaherty. Lots of Siroccans drop their real names for a liltier one. Tanya wasn't a Siroccan, but had been in—a black-haired twit who Sinnott didn't recollect.

New arrivals got the news and occasionally a question was yelled over the rock at Carol, she calling back an answer. Over another beer, Sinnott got details and sequence of what they were talking about, which a little later Carol summarized.

Wednesday morning he typed up a script, which if a plot idea developed he might use.

The Saturday night before last, about 9:30, Tanya O'Flaherty had ducked into FastSave Drugs in Tanforan Mall at the north edge of San Bruno for cigarettes at the machine just inside the doors there. But a well dressed young dude was using it, so she waited as he punched out a pack of Salems.

Turning, he paused to push it into a pocket of his quality blue jacket, then was past her on her left and out the doors.

Tanya got her smokes and waltzed out and was about to cross the drive area, but pulled up as a small, trim-looking tan car passed in front of her. In the right-front window was Lady Jane, green jacket and yellow bandana, as Tanya had seen her in Sirocco a lot of nights. Of the driver all she saw was a hand on the wheel that came out of a blue sleeve.

A second later she'd forgotten him and Lady Jane.

A week passed and it's Monday night. She's in Antlers, the freak joint just off downtown San Bruno, and the owner, H.D., pounds the plank for attention.

Sinnott had been in Antlers and seen and heard H.D., a huge-bellied throwback to the hippie '60s, wild grey mane and huge brown eyes operating separately. So he put words in his mouth that should be close enough to his speech of Monday.

"Carol at Sirocco wants if any you illegitimates sees an old broad in a rotten green jacket and a yellow or green bandana, she's missing! Her name's Lady Jane and she don't talk! So call Sirocco if you see her, or tell me!"

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Sinnott had a guy scream, "Why's Carol think she's up this way?"

"She don't think anything! She's calling all the freak joints!"

A girl: "How long's she been missing?"

"Since Friday before last!"

At that, two color shots that had lain around in the dust in Tanya's brain popped up side by side—Lady Jane in the window of the trim tan car, and the well dressed young stud shoving the Salem pack into his blue pocket Saturday before last.

She went out and at a phone stand called Sirocco and described the two snapshots to Carol.

All of that Sinnott had picked up from talk around and across him, and Carol's responses to questions yelled. The rest of his script was what he'd seen and heard as Carol thumbed off the music and gazed around until everybody got it that she wanted their ears.

"Most of you have heard what Tanya told me last night. So let's start with the assumption that the young guy she saw buying Salems was the driver of that tan car she saw Lady Jane in, okay?"

A guy called, "What make?"

"She don't know. Just a neat-looking tan car, pretty new." She rubbed her underlip a second. "Let's say he stopped for her at a bus stop and she got through to him she's heading for Greyhound in the City. He stops to get her some Salems and—"

A different guy: "How's he know her brand?"

"She mouths it, or shows him an empty pack, or maybe she talks fine when she's not here, who knows? But say he gets the Salems, then drives her to Greyhound and he's an okay guy, hasn't hurt her or anything. Say all that and he's still worth finding."

A girl: "Why, Carol?"

" 'Cause he could say where he dropped her off, and if it was Greyhound and the cops check him out and he's okay, we'd pretty well know she took off on her own and everything's all right."

She had a notebook and was turning pages. "Here's Tanya's description! He's about twenty-five, medium height and build, short brown hair, good blue jacket, blue eyes she thinks, business type or class-type salesman. Thin face, sharp chin with a cleft." She poked a finger in her uncleft chin, and drew a short line. "Vertical dent. So look for that. Also, his left ear was wrapped in flesh-colored tape, a neat job like by a doctor. Probably the tape's off by now, but his left ear might have a scar or mark of some kind."

She paused and let them digest those points. Then: "Okay. I've called the freak bars about him, and I told Vardon, who'll pass the

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word to other P.D.s and the Sheriff's Department. He says not to expect anything, there's no crime, so cops won't be looking for him, but if a cop happens to see him he'll find out if he drives a tan car, if he picked up an old lady in a green jacket that Saturday night, and if so where he took her and so forth."

She turned to stick the notebook back in her purse. A guy said, "She's an old survivor, she's probly okay—drifted into town, the old feet started itching, off she goes."

Carol nodded. "Right. But I'd like to know for sure." The silver-tipped gaze traveled around, taking them all into its circle. She said quietly, "If *we* don't give a damn about an old pussycat like her, who will?"

They were quiet. A guy raised his glass at her, so did others.

She made a little dismissive gesture, then said briskly, "Okay. So any of you see a young guy like that, tell me or Parker—or Rip, if he's on—where you saw him and when. I'll tell Vardon and he'll try to find him and get his story."

Those were the doings at Sirocco on Tuesday night that Sinnott typed up on Wednesday as a scene he might use if he got a plot idea.

Next Saturday night, Rip, the fill-in guy, was behind the bar—a short square package of muscle and animal sex with hard thin eyes.

Sinnott didn't ask him about Carol, but someone did and he said she'd called in with the flu. The guy asked if anything was new on Lady Jane or Tanya's man and Rip said not that he'd heard.

A darkly good-looking girl sat at the piano and Rip offed the music as she began a slow, moody piece. The freaks sat quiet, as did Sinnott and other aging sports on hand. Some freaks looked thoughtful, but most looked like they didn't really go for this gloomy stuff, they liked an upbeat. Rip leaned on the bar and fingered his chin.

She stopped and there were polite claps and a girl asked what the number was. "Nothing, just noodling," she said. A guy said, "Play something else, okay, Pat? Excuse me, but that was a downer." Pat shot him a quick look, then shrugged and went to a table where a girl and a blackbearded pirate sat, he giving Pat a slow nod and laying a paw on hers. She looked Rip's way and he nodded. She smiled, gazed off. Sinnott didn't know what those glances and nods meant, if anything.

A chubby youth strutted to the piano and was loud and bad. Freaks groaned and two girls threw popcorn at him. Rip turned up the music and the youth slunk back to his place.

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Sinnott drank beer and heard over and under the music some dumb remarks, now and then a perceptive one, some jokes and silliness—Sirocco seeming as usual but not so. Varieties of moods and emotions bounced off and slid around each other, not blending. Carol was a focus, gathering moods together in a mellow mix. She was Queen of the Night and this was her realm. Rip was just a hired hand putting in time. So mused Sinnott that jangly, unfocused Saturday night at Sirocco that he cut short.

Sunday broke zippy and clear, a day for travel and change.

Sinnott called his brother and announced a visit, got an okay, packed a bag, and a few hours later debarked Greyhound at the village of Sebastopol, and shortly was on a bus wending along the river road west to Henniker, a town like forty or fifty years ago when the world was young and full of hope and so was he.

That afternoon he took a canoe ride with his nephew up the river and after dinner had a good time with his brother discussing pols they hated, his sister-in-law ducking to bed early, having heard it all so many times before.

Monday, they tripped to the champagne works at Guerneville, learned the steps between when the grape gets picked and finds itself in a bottle, interesting enough. Then at Henniker Inn, Sinnott ate too much crab-something, which lay heavy on his stomach but maybe perked up his brain, seafood having that rep. He flashed on something he'd let slide a while, which when he got back home he'd better attend to, as contacts wither and die if you let them. He didn't want his contact with Weare to do that.

Detective-Sergeant Thomas Weare, Sheriff's Department—a meager grey guy, who along with regular chores is liaison between County Jail and a service outfit that last year Sinnott, questing story ideas, had volunteered with, becoming the G.E.D. guy, that being a federal program for dropouts, including jail inmates who want their high-school equivalency.

Weare and he had hit it off. Weare put in the word and jail deputies let Sinnott wander at will and at his own pace. When someone waiting trial for murder, rape, assault, or whatever wanted to talk, Sinnott would linger and pick up stuff.

Weare had told him his wife had read some of Sinnott's stories and liked them. He didn't say if *he* had read them, maybe not wanting to put himself in a position where he'd have to comment or criticize. He was pleasant and helpful, but kept a space between

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himself and everyone he dealt with at the Courthouse, including Sinnott. Sinnott would ask about jail and courtroom procedures, and cases in the news or that inmates had told him about, and get answers he used as anchor points in his stories. Then last February the service outfit got a new director who established her identity by changing everybody around, and Sinnott found himself in the office behind a typewriter, so quit.

But he kept up with Weare, tripping down to Redwood every so often. If the detective was free, they'd go down to the big restaurant under the Courthouse for a talk session, and the contact had stayed alive.

Tuesday afternoon about 1:30, Sinnott was on the beach at Sheep Rock, thinking how he'd bus home tomorrow and on Thursday would look up Weare. The sun was warm and surf pounded softly, and he stretched out on a beach towel, spread his shirt over his face, and went to sleep.

Tuesday about 1:30, a jowled, well dressed man came to the window in the lobby of the Sheriff's Department, third floor of the Courthouse, and said he was John Doland, backing that up with a business card. He said he'd like to talk to a detective, preferably Sergeant Weare, about a salesman of his not at work yesterday or today.

Shortly he was in Weare's cubicle, telling him that yesterday Richard Farley had missed five scheduled appointments and not called or answered his phone—totally unlike him. In two years with Doland, he'd never screwed up.

This morning about 11:00, Doland had driven to Farley's apartment on Renault in Redwood, and, getting nothing at his bell, talked to the manager, who said he rarely saw Farley. Yesterday he'd noted his car in its slot. He opened an inside door and they went down and saw in the garage, nearly empty on a work morning, Farley's tan Honda.

Weare made notes on a yellow pad.

Doland handed him a small color shot in a cardboard frame, remarking that he photoed all his agents. Weare studied a three-quarters-to-the-left view of a smiling, brown-haired young man with alert blue eyes, long cheeks, and a sharp chin with a cleft.

He put down that Farley was about 5′9″, 23, medium build, good dresser. "Any scars or impairments?" No. "How's his hearing?" Fine. "Any recent damage or hurt to either ear?"

Doland growled, "No, why?"

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Weare murmured something, went on, "Does he smoke?" Not that Doland knew.

Weare learned and wrote down that Farley was single, from L.A., had an A.A. from the community college there. His parents were dead and he had no sibs or known relatives. Nobody at work was close to him that Doland had observed or heard about. He didn't know if Farley had a girl friend.

For recreation, it seemed Farley liked to drive around and look at historic old towns. He worked some weekends but had had no appointments scheduled for last weekend.

Weare kept the photo. When Doland left, Weare pawed through a bunch of envelopes in a drawer and got out one with *Lady Jane* scrawled on it, from which he took a folded yellow sheet that had two clumps of notes he'd made during two recent phone calls from Detective Arnold Vardon of the Lindenvale P.D.

The first clump noted the date of the first call that the old lady was missing, and her description. Then came some blank lines, then the date of Vardon's second call, followed by notes of what a girl named Tanya O'Flaherty had seen in Tanforan Mall three Saturday nights back.

Inside half an hour, Weare was discussing Richard Farley with a senior citizen named Beeman, who gave the young man high marks as a tenant—no parties, no girls as he knew, no drinking or smoking, prompt with rent, kept his car nice.

They went down to the garage, which had a wide ramp in and out. Weare gazed at and into the tan Honda in space #18, and nothing particular caught his eye. Both its doors were locked.

Beeman took him up to Apartment 316, a studio in reasonable order. In the kitchen sink were a few used plates, silverware, and cups, probably meaning that Farley let things pile up a little between washings. A closet held good clothes, including a blue jacket. No used cigarette packs showed in the wastebasket or trashbag, and no ashtrays were around.

Half an hour later, Weare was at Vardon's desk in the detectives' room at the P.D. on the northwest edge of Lindenvale. He talked about what he'd been up to, and showed Farley's photo.

Vardon—slim, fortyish, stringy brown hair and moustache, nothing brown suit.

Weare thought they might show the photo to Tanya O'Flaherty and, if she said yes, find out why she'd said her man had a bandaged left ear.

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Vardon looked gloomy. "I never saw her. Carol gave me the information and asked if I'd put it around, so I did. But I never got Tanya's address."

Weare asked who Carol was. Vardon told him and said he'd see if she was home. He leafed a notebook, punched phone buttons, hung up after a while, leafed and punched again. "Yeah, Parker—Vardon. Carol there? —Okay, I'll catch her tonight. You wouldn't happen to know Tanya O'Flaherty's address, would you? —Okay, see you."

He punched again and barked at the phone, "Vardon, and I'm on my way." Hanging up, he grinned. "H.D. at Antlers. I always warn him. I wouldn't want to walk in on something I might have to do something about." Weare rated that worth a smile.

They rode to San Bruno in Weare's old red Pontiac. Two freaks were shooting pool and two were at the bar. A huge man with big brown eyes working separately rolled up to them, shouting, "Vardon, my favorite corrupt cop!" One eye bent Weare's way as he sneered, "Who's this?"

"D.A. Sorenson, come to shut you down."

After a minute or so of similar baloney, Vardon asked if H.D. knew a small black-haired girl named Tanya O'Flaherty. The owner passed the question to his customers.

A poolshooter said, "She's gone." Vardon found out that he hardly knew her, didn't know where she'd lived or who with, if any, or who she knew. He said he'd happened to run into her last Sunday afternoon at Greyhound in the City, where he'd driven a dude in his cab. She mentioned she was on her way home to Oregon. He wished her luck and that was all he could tell Vardon, okay?

The detectives returned to Lindenvale P.D. and sat in the easy room. Vardon said, "Richard Farley looks like Tanya described, has a blue jacket and a tan car, but not a bandaged ear." He roamed around. "Three people missing who might connect or might not. Tanya's gone by choice it looks, Lady Jane is fifty-fifty, Farley looks like a victim but that's not certain."

He said he'd find out if Carol or anyone at Sirocco knew where Tanya might have gone.

Weare drove to the Courthouse and made out a search warrant, which he dug out a judge to authorize, and took another detective to Renault Street. For the next hour they searched #316, then the tan Honda.

Those were the doings of that Tuesday which Sinnott didn't know

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about at the time. Late Wednesday he was back in town. His Thursday began at the doughnut shop with a large coffee, an old-fashioned glazed doughnut, and the morning *Chronicle*.

An inside page rounds up North Peninsula crimes of yesterday. He scanned short accounts of assorted burglaries and muggings, and a paragraph stating that a Redwood realty man had been missing since the weekend and police and the Sheriff's Department were investigating. The name Richard Farley he didn't know.

About 11:00, he called the Sheriff's Department and Weare was in, and free for lunch.

About 11:50, Sinnott went through the open door into Weare's cubicle. The detective looked up, smiled, and went on writing some notes as Sinnott took the guest chair.

After a while Weare pushed the yellow pad aside and asked Sinnott if he knew a Lindenvale woman called Lady Jane.

"I know she's missing."

Weare reached him a small photo. "Richard Farley—ever see him?"

"No. There was a story this morning that he's missing."

"Do you know Tanya O'Flaherty?"

"No. But—" He told what he knew about Tanya O'Flaherty and Lady Jane.

Weare said, "So you're up on the case."

"No, I've been out of town. I don't know anything about Farley, if he ties in."

Weare gave him some facts about Farley.

Sinnott said, "So he has a tan Honda, but his left ear is okay. What does Tanya say?"

Weare said the word was that she was off to Oregon or somewhere.

"So you don't know if Farley's the man she saw."

Weare got his jacket and Sinnott thought they were heading for lunch, but the detective went the other way in the hall, opening a door across it with a key. Sinnott followed him into a room with cartons and boxes, file cabinets, and clothes with tags on racks. Weare got a plywood box with a hinged lid, which he set on a table and lifted the top. Sinnott looked at a jumble of worn old shoes of various shapes, sizes, and colors, men's and women's.

Weare said, "No pairs. Four left, five right—five men's, three women's, and this one." He held up a worn blue tennis shoe.

Sinnott said, "It's got worn spots like Lady Jane's, clean white laces—could fit her, I guess."

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"Would you say it's hers?"

"No. Could be, is all I'd say."

Weare dropped the shoe back in. "Carol says the same, so does Parker—you know them?"

"Sure, at Sirocco."

"Others there think so, too, but nobody can say for sure." Weare closed the box and carried it to where it had been, and pulled the door to behind them with a hard click.

On the escalator Weare said, "The box was in the trunk of Farley's Honda. No prints on it or on the shoes—lots of smears and grime, but no stains that seem to mean anything." Sinnott translated that as no bloodstains.

The restaurant is vast, so even when full up, as always at noon, someone or a group is always getting up from a table. You pay at the counter, and after eating dump cups, plates, and utensils in one of the bins and rack your tray.

Their table was off against the east wall. Weare had picked a tuna salad and a large milk, Sinnott a chiliburger and a large coffee. For a while all they did was eat and drink.

Weare's salad was down to a few shreds and Sinnott was finished when Weare leaned back and for five or six minutes gave Sinnott the details of his working Tuesday, which had ended with the search of Farley's studio and his Honda. The box of shoes was the big score, nothing else they had turned up added much. He said that yesterday he had talked to various people at Dalton Realty and in Farley's building, then had gone to Sirocco with Vardon and found no one who said they knew where Tanya might have gone.

Sinnott said, "Could Farley have slipped a bandage on his ear as a disguise?"

Weare murmured that he'd never heard of anyone disguising himself by bandaging an ear and not doing anything to change his face. Sinnott granted that he never had, either. "So maybe she saw someone else that night."

"Maybe. Or maybe he hurt his ear Saturday."

Sinnott needed a refill. Weare would take a small coffee with a lot of milk. Sinnott went to get them, thinking of nine different shoes in a box in the trunk of a young man's car. A young man who was sort of a loner and liked to drive off by himself on weekends.

Back at the table, he said, "Could he be a psycho whose thing is to pick up old derelicts, male and female, drive somewhere remote, kill them, bury or dump them, and keep a shoe as a token, a fetish?"

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Weare said, "Then he panics for some reason, or no reason, and takes off? If so, he left his clothes, car, and everything else—including $2,600 in a Wells Fargo account."

"And his box of fetishes."

"Yes. Which if he's a victim might not be his. Someone could have planted the box in his trunk."

"To make it look like he's a psycho killer?"

"Or for some other reason. Or no reason."

"Could the blue tennis shoe be just coincidence?"

Weare shrugged, sipped coffee-milk.

"One in a random bunch of old shoes somebody collected and put in Farley's trunk as a sick joke?"

Weare got up. "Maybe Farley's joke."

Sinnott guessed he was saying that right now there was no basis for any theory—they didn't even know if there'd been a crime.

Dumping their scrap, they racked their trays and made parting remarks, Sinnott going into daylight and walking six blocks to the bus.

Back in his room, he typed until dark. Switching on the light, he stayed with it until he got down all Weare had told him. Stacking his pages, he saw that his wind-up clock said past 8:30.

He knew that from the scenes he had, he could probably boil out a plot when he settled on who would be his fiction killer. Farley? Tanya, maybe? Lady Jane? Someone else? Or could he make it all a big black joke, with all of them involved?

Feeling weary and generally disillusioned with life and writing, he thought he'd lie down a while, then foray out for something to eat. Snapping out the light, he got off his pants and slippers and into bed, pulled the cover over, and shortly felt himself drifting.

Faint piano music, slow and sad. The hills above Henniker, night—murky, starless sky.

Over the hill came a lopsided, huge-wheeled black wagon dragged by two haggard horses. He ducked into some bushes.

Figures in dark robes tumbled out and scurried around back. Then one was out in front with a flaming torch, and four others came in a bunch, bearing something—he couldn't see what it was. Wind groaned, and in lulls sounded faintly the sad piano.

The troll with the torch led the way down the hillside. Sinnott crept along off to the side and rear, feeling excitement, that he was about to be shown something important.

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They were along a short stretch of beach, the ocean stretching shiny-black and still.

Up popped a dumpster.

Dreams have their own logic, which you go along with if you feel you're on the track of something.

The torchman stood by the dumpster and the four bearers approached. Then a slash of wind tore the flame off the torch and it sailed away. Total black fell over everything. Sinnott heard yells, curses, a scream, some nutty laughter. He strained to see, but thick black pushed at his eyes and he put his hands to them.

Pressure eased and he dropped his hands and saw in the light of the torch again the five trolls wending back up the hill, torchman leading and the others bunched behind. Wind sighed and in gaps the piano sounded. They went around the two haggard horses and shoved into the back what they had borne down the hill.

Sinnott felt suckered. They'd borne something down the hill, borne it back, and he'd learned nothing. He yelled, "Inadequate!" and jerked awake at 12:47 by the clock glow.

Switching on the light, he recalled how he'd been sure the dream was going to give him something he really wanted, and it hadn't.

Or maybe it had and he was too dense to see it.

Maybe the torch stood for his capacity for insight, which had gone to black at the crucial moment. The dream had done its job and it was his fault he'd missed the point.

He sighed, thoughts drifting. He got quick vignettes of Tanya at Tanforan, the man with the bandaged ear, Lady Jane in the car window, Farley unbandaged, the blue tennis shoe among others, Rip telling the guy that Carol had the flu, Pat at the piano, the nods and smiles, the jangly mood that night at Sirocco. The shots whirled around, then they came together and thickened into a mellow yellow mix and he had his plot.

He slapped his paws together with a little yelp of pleasure—but, no, not quite yet. One thing was missing, one scene to pull together all the scenes. He could imagine it, but the other scenes were based on what he'd seen and heard and this last one should be, too.

Jumping up, he loped down the short hall to the bathroom, got clean and combed, hurried back, and went through a pile of clothes for a clean shirt, underwear, socks. He knew that to get the scene started, he had to look like a cool, together person who knew what he was up to.

In a green button-up sweater and reasonable pants and shoes, he

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went down the stairs of the rooming house and out into the clear night, hurrying to where the story had begun and would end.

Music was off. The clock over the mirror said 1:50. Carol said, "Last call."

A freak, Sinnott, and another aging sport took her up.

She set up their beers, then glided among tables with an empty carton, scooping up bottles and glasses, leaving the junk for a final tour or for Rip or Parker in the morning. At the sink, she plucked out glasses, straightened bottles in the carton, and set it at the storeroom door.

The sport who wasn't Sinnott had wended out. The freak asked for three Olys to go in a paper sack, bade goodnight, and was gone. The clock said 1:58. Carol gazed with meaning at Sinnott's nearly full glass, strolled to the door to swing it open and bolt it after him.

Leaving his beer, he walked to her, fixing in his head that right now he was Sinnott the character in his story who if this scene was to move had to move it.

He heard his voice, cool and pleasant, "Tanya didn't see a bandage on Farley's ear."

Grey eyes were wide and still. Hand on doorpull tightened but door didn't swing.

"My name's Sinnott. I write crime fiction. I'm doing a story based on Lady Jane, Farley, and Tanya. I'm playing myself in this scene and asking if you will, too." Sinnott in real life could never give a girl words like that in an easy, amiable tone, but fictional Sinnott did.

Her mouth opened, but snapped shut. She slid the bolt and stepped back as three firm raps sounded, and, after a pause, two more. She shot an odd, measuring look at Sinnott, then said sharp and clear to the door, "Don't say anything! A guy's here, we're talking. Everything's okay, so go home, okay?"

"But—"

"I said don't say anything! I know him, one of the older dudes—he said something and I want to hear a little more. If you want, call me, but don't say anything, just go!"

After a few seconds came two submissive raps. Carol blew some air, folded her arms, said crisply to Sinnott, "Whadeu want?"

"A scene—which starts with me asking the bright barmaid if she'll play along. That's the fiction, also the reality."

She had moved to the end of the bar. "Are you a nut?"

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"Somewhat. But all you have to do is tell me to go and I'm gone." And the scene would be over, which he'd accept, having done what he could to move it.

She sized him up a few seconds, then ducked under the bar flap and proceeded to midpoint, just short of the gong, where her stool was. Laying her trim butt against the top of it and tilting it to the back bar, she refolded her arms, and he read in her grey gaze, I'm here. Your move.

He walked to where his glass sat, a stool beyond her. "You know about Richard Farley missing, and Tanya. And about the box of shoes in the trunk of his tan Honda, one of them maybe Lady Jane's." Her cool gaze said she did. "If Tanya saw Farley buying Salems that night, his ear wasn't bandaged—unless he hurt it Saturday, which is possible. But I'm not talking possibilities, I'm talking a story, which will work better if the bandage is a lie."

The phone rang. She hopped to it. Sinnott heard, "Yeah, everything's okay. —Wait a sec." She ran to the music control at the far end, flipped a switch, and rock sounded, just loud enough so she could crouch and talk without Sinnott hearing.

Three minutes later, she was back on her stool. "Why would she lie?"

"Not her. She's a lesser character who got bus fare to Oregon or somewhere, because if the cops got on her she might come apart."

She shook her head, said quietly, "You've lost me."

"Okay. Here's what I'll have in the story. You gave Vardon a true description of the man Tanya saw, but added the bandage to confuse the issue—you wanted the cops to spot him if the freaks didn't, but were laying a basis for Tanya to say, if they took her to identify him, that no, he wasn't the guy."

She blinked. "I wanted Tanya to *not* identify him?"

"Yes, if it got to that point." He smiled. "I'm talking about you in the story, of course, fictional Carol."

Her eyes were narrow and silver flecks shifted around in the grey. She said slowly, "Why does fictional Carol want fictional Tanya not to identify him?"

"So the cops will have no reason to hold him."

"Why don't I want the cops to hold him?"

"Because *you* want him."

"Why?"

"You and your friends, the freaks."

She flicked her tongue around her lips, murmured, "Something's

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coming." She closed her eyes, raised a hand, and a finger circled slowly, like picking up bits floating around, herding them toward her head. "I'm getting something. Yes—Dylan, the 'Sixties, the Beatles, Janis." She had a tight smile. "Great music, great ideals. I was a kid then, my sister was a hippie. She lost it, everybody lost it, it was gone before I got there." Her silver-tipped eyes gazed off. "Make love, not war. Summer of love, all we need is love. Communes, Manson family, families." Her eyes swung to Sinnott and she gave a sharp laugh. "That it? You doing a hippie-family story?"

Sinnott said, "However it works."

She snorted. "It's over, haven't you heard? It's long gone, ancient history. All the hippies are dead."

"Maybe not all. H.D. lives."

"As a relic."

He reached for his glass, but she bent forward, dumped and refilled it, and put it in front of him. Then she filled a water glass, hooked sandaled toes on the rung, drank from her glass, and leaned forward, elbows on knees.

He raised the full glass at her, took a sip. "You spoke of great music—deu know a song of those years, 'Turn! Turn! Turn!'?"

She closed her eyes, smiled, la-la'd the tune softly, shoulders moving to the beat as he went on.

"It tells how for everything there's a season—life is circular, things come around again. Maybe the hippies didn't die. Maybe they're back in the underbrush, waiting their time around again, smoky eyes with silver glints peering out."

She gazed from the underbrush, said softly, "You're something, Sutton—was that your name?" He nodded. "You really are."

"No, I'm not—but *really* isn't the point: this is fiction. So am I right now. So are you, if you will be."

"You want me part of a born-again hippie family, is that it?"

"Can we work on that? Say there's a core group in the family—you, of course, Queen of the Night. Parker, maybe—"

She gave a hoot. "Parker a hippie? Three kids, all his free time studying C.P.A. so he can get a class job, shed this dump, get respectable? Come on, be reasonable."

Sinnott smiled. "Could that be fictional Carol talking?"

She blinked, then shot him a tight grin. "You mean, the lady doth protest too much?"

"Fictional Carol might. But leave Parker. I'd make Rip a core

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member. And Pat, the piano whiz. And H.D., and Blackbeard the Pirate."

"Larry Hoffman." She drank and set her glass on the back bar. "Okay, they'd be okay—who else?"

"Your friend who knocked, of course, and then called you, who right away you didn't want me to see or hear—why?"

Her lips pinched. "I have a private life I like to keep that way, all right?" She straightened to turn and frown at the clock. "Two twenty-five." She patted a yawn. "This is kind of fun—different, anyway—but if your secret purpose isn't to attack me, deu want to start winding it up?"

He nodded, but didn't say anything. He had a feeling that right now it was for her to move the scene, if it was going to move further. He took some beer and waited.

A few seconds hauled by. Then she said, "Iceland," and blinked, looking surprised. "I said that, didn't I? That was me. Iceland—why'd I say that? Freudian slip or something?" Her smile was odd. "Well—" there were glints of silver "—maybe it'd work, maybe you can use it. Deu know anything about Iceland, Sutton?"

He shook his head.

"I read about it," she said. "Norse wanderers settled there a thousand years ago—more. They had quite a society—no king, no ayatollahs, no hogtrough pols, no court system, no ripoff lawyers, no judges, no jails, no gallows—nothing between the people and justice. Maybe the first and last true democracy."

He was quiet. She said, "So what's my point, huh, and what's it got to do with your hippie story? Okay—say there's a murder, they got a suspect. What do they do? Call a town meeting, everybody comes. Witnesses tell what they saw, evidence is laid out, the suspect makes his pitch, then everybody votes. Say they vote guilty. All right, that's it, case closed—no appeals, no baloney, the guy's guilty. Everybody goes home."

She watched him with a little smile. He said, "What happens to him?"

"He goes home, too."

"No punishment?"

"Not laid out. But people avoid him. Which makes sense—hang around with him and you could wind up a dead innocent bystander."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that a warm climate makes for dreamers, and a cold makes realists. The guilty guy had wronged the victim's family and

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friends—if they want to give him justice feel free, but don't lay it on us, okay? Everybody's got problems—take care of yours or live with it, and we'll handle ours."

Sinnott drank, said slowly, "You're saying Farley wasn't society's problem, but the family's?"

She murmured, "Am I? Maybe I am." She grinned. "Would that work in your story? If so, use it—though maybe I made it all up. Or my mother did. I said I read about Iceland, but that's a lie, who'd read about Iceland? My mother told me how it was then. I'm Icelandic heritage. My real name's Kristin."

Sinnott smiled. She said sharply, "Think I'm kidding? I'm not. I'm Kristin, and I believe in Iceland justice and reality." She flung an arm. "Society doesn't give a damn for a crazy old-lady freak, why should they? She's never done anything for them. She meant nothing to them alive, why should she dead?" Her silver glare was beautiful, he thought. "You people, you Anglos, you Wasps—"

"I'm Irish."

"You Celts—all of you here. You live by and for baloney, adore it, can't get enough of it, gorge your souls with it."

She slumped forward, grinned again, murmured, "How was that?"

"Good hippie talk."

She raised her chin, took some breaths. "Want me to go on? What's a murder trial in California?"

"Tell me."

"I'll tell you. It's baloney artists feeding baloney to a jury that wouldn't know anything else, that pretends to give a damn that an old-lady freak was offed, which they don't, and why should they? Say the D.A. serves up the tastier baloney, so they say Guilty—adding up to what? More baloney. Three or four years he's out, ready and eager to scout up another old freak."

She sat back, closed her eyes, and when they opened they weren't silver ice. "Birds gotta swim, women gotta babble. What you wanted, right? Okay. So you got me to be Kristin, and I and the freak family want to find out if Tanya's guy hurt Lady Jane—that the story?" He nodded. She flopped a hand, sighed. "You finish it. You're the writer, so-called. Tell me what happens."

Sinnott finished his beer. He said, "The cops don't spot Tanya's man, but a freak does, in his tan Honda. He follows him to Dalton Realty, calls Carol—"

"Kristin."

"Calls Kristin, and she collects Tanya, who looks at his Honda,

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says yes, gets a peek at him, and it's yes again. Freaks follow him, find where he lives—"

She was taking it in, eyes wide and deep, face still. He said, "It's Friday. Farley leaves work, goes somewhere to dinner maybe, or to a movie, wherever. He drives home late, past midnight. In the garage, freaks are waiting—"

She held up a hand. "Friday midnight I'm working."

"Other freaks are waiting. They hustle him out to their car, take him somewhere quiet and isolated, maybe in the hills or down the coast, maybe a safe house. They call Kristin at Sirocco, tell her they have him. She calls others."

She was leaned forward, cheeks on palms, eyes steady on him. He said, "Now it's well past two. The core group of freaks are assembled—Rip, Pat, Blackbeard, H.D., Kristin of course, Tanya, others—maybe a dozen or so.

"There's a trial. Tanya tells how she saw Farley buy the Salems, he's the man. He denies it, says he's never seen the old lady—"

She held up a hand again. "He's lying." Her tone was flat and grey like her eyes. "We know it. It's in his voice and his eyes. We keep pressing."

"Had you looked in the trunk, found her blue shoe?"

"No. But I knew. So did others. But some weren't sure. So we kept pressing." She put her hands to her head, shook it fast, stared at him, said softly, "You're really something, you really are. You got me going and now it's like I really am Kristin, girl of your story. I'm talking like her, thinking like her, feeling like her—"

Sinnott said, "It's into Saturday, and you're pressing."

Her lids drooped. She was caught in her part and so was he, or they weren't—they were two fiction characters or pretending they were. In the crummy, dim-lit place where the story had started, they were making the ending.

Sinnott said in the tone of a hypnotist he'd seen in a dogeared old movie, "You know he's guilty."

"Guilty." Her eyes and tone were the hypnotizee's in the dogeared movie. "And we press. And finally he says, 'Yes, yes, and don't—' " She licked her lips, shook her head. "Yes. That's how it was. He tells us he's killed her and where he put her." She sat back, folded her hands on her lap, and closed her eyes.

Sinnott, fictional hypnotist, said, "Now it's Saturday evening. Rip goes to work, says you're sick. H.D. is at Antlers. Pat and others show up at Sirocco. She plays a slow tune. You and others, in some-

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body's black van, are driving Farley's body to an isolated area in the country somewhere where he'd told you he'd put Lady Jane. In a dumpster."

Her eyes sprang wide, fingers flew to her face. She said nothing for a few seconds, nor did he. Then she whispered, "Was that good?"

He nodded. She said curiously, "Why a dumpster?"

"I had a dream. Five robed trolls carried a body down a hill to a dumpster."

"Five. Down a hill to a dumpster." Her tone was faint wonder. "Dreams. They can be something, can't they?" He waited. "Go on."

"Lady Jane's body is in it, like Farley told you. You lift her out, dump his body in. You carry her up the hill to the black van."

"Why?"

"You want a nice place, maybe near the ocean—maybe the mouth of the Russian River. You wrap her in clean sheets, maybe with a carton of Salems, a few lighters, bury her with a hippie service. She has the sound of night birds, and in the day the steady rhythm of the ocean—a fair place for an old lady freak to rest at the end of her trip."

She slid off the stool, stretched her small frame. "A nice ending for a fairly horrible story. That it?"

He nodded. The phone rang. The clock said 3:07.

She answered, said briskly, "Yeah, we just finished. Like I said, he's a writer, and he really got me going, like he wanted." She threw him a glance and he shrugged, smiled. She listened, then: "Right. But that's life, full of weird people who pop up, and you can duck out or go along, find out where they're going. —Uh huh, in a few minutes. Come over and I'll tell you about it."

She put their glasses in the sink, got a jacket from a back shelf, and looped it on her shoulders. "Mouth of the Russian River, you said. A guy I used to know was a fishing nut and took me there for a salmon run. Nice area."

Sinnott asked, "That true?"

She smiled. "Want it to be?" She scooped up her purse and moved to the door, as he did. She looked up at him, said softly, "That was something. For a while there it was real, I really was this Iceland hippie chick, Kristin." Unbolting the door, she pulled it open, pulled it shut behind them, used a key. "How you getting home?"

"I'm only a few blocks."

They walked to the city parking lot, where were spread around

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three cars, one a white Toyota she headed for, he alongside. He'd walk out the alley at the rear, west a block up Main, a block north again, and west to his rooming house.

At the car she paused. "You going to tell this to Vardon?"

"I don't know him. I know Weare, the Sheriff's guy who talked to you yesterday."

"Yeah. Little guy, looks like a social worker. Probably a pitbull." Sinnott smiled. "Going to tell *him?*"

"No. It's fiction, no use to him."

She hopped in, stuck in her key, started the motor. He said, "Thank you for getting so fully into it."

She smiled. "It was fun, I enjoyed it."

The door stayed open. He lingered, watching shifting glints in her eyes as she murmured, "Curious about who knocked, and I talked to on the phone?"

"You said that was private."

"Sure. But fictionally, who deu think it was?"

He smiled. "Maybe H.D.?"

"Or Parker, who I said no way?"

"Maybe him, yeah. Maybe I'll make it him."

She flicked her lashes at him, purred, "In a crime story, isn't it always the least likely?" Pulling the door shut, she diddled fingers at him and zooped off. He stood with a hand up, watching her south down State.

He walked up Main, feeling bushed but mellow, pretty much like a fiction character who'd traveled in search of a plot and with the help of a bright, been-around bar girl, found it. Loose and sloppy, but with an ending fiction has to arrive at. Reality doesn't—reality has no clear endings, just situations changing or fading into new ones. *Turn, turn, turn—*

Headlights down Main slowed, like maybe an off-duty cop sizing up a lone man walking at 3:15 on a Friday morning in Lindenvale, then the car picked up and went past, and at the corner of State turned south.

Sinnott walked home.

"Q"

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CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE

EQ MID-DEC/88

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INDEX TO VOLUME NINETY-TWO—JULY–MID-DEC. 1988

ADCOCK, THOMAS: The School of Ten Bells	August	96
The Trespass	November	16
AGUERREBERRE, RUBEN LOZA: The Man Who Stole from Borges	November	54
ALLYN, DOUG: A Death in Heaven	December	4
ARDAI, CHARLES: The Theft of Incrementation	July	53
ATODA, TAKASHI: The Visitor	Mid-December	96
BANKIER, WILLIAM: Coming Clean	November	111
How Dangerous Is Your Brother?	September	75
One Day at a Time	October	38
Two Bards with One Stone	Mid-December	110
BARNARD, ROBERT: A Good Deed	August	114
More Final Than Divorce	October	104
BATEMAN, HENRIETTE P.: Silent Verdict	October	26
BAXT, GEORGE: Going to Pieces	July	38
BITTICKS, SARI: Stress Reduction	Mid-December	46
BOSWORTH, JANE: Clippin' Coyotes	July	96
BRAUN, LILIAN JACKSON: Stanley and Spook	October	60
BREEN, JON L.: The Jury Box	Nov.–Mid-Dec.	
BRETNOR, REGINALD: The Murderers' Circle	July	4
BROWN, JEFF: Plantagenet	October	112
BURANELLI, MARGUERITE: Murder in the Lab	November	82
BURTON, ANDREW J.: What's a Friend For?	August	113
Your We-Hope-Not-Typical Connoisseur	November	94
BUSKIRK, ROSAMOND: Fiery Warning	Mid-December	19
BYRD, ELIZABETH: The Message	December	46
Prodigal Grandson	August	73
CAIL, CAROL: What's Out There?	July	111
CARPENTER, CARLETON: A Part in the Picture	September	25
CLAYTON, DEBORAH HILLYARD: The Move	Mid-December	40
COLLINS, LORRAINE: The Nature of the Beast	October	83
DAVIES, ROBERTSON: Einstein and the Little Lord	Mid-December	56
DE MONTSERRAT, MARIA: The Sunday Bird	August	93
DOMINICK, JANET BLAIR: The Kidnaper's Threat	September	34
DUNSANY, LORD: The New Master	November	73
DURHAM, MARY E.: Deli Blues	October	81
EQMM READERS AWARD	Mid-December	86
FORBES, STRINGFELLOW: Walking Lonesome	July	131
GIBBONS, RICHARD PATRICK: The White Card	December	40
GILBERT, MICHAEL: The Freedom Folk	December	113
HAENSZEL, ARDA M.: By Reason or Insanity	October	111
HARSH, NOLEN: Oh, No!	October	81

(Continued on page 157)

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INDEX TO VOLUME NINETY-TWO—JULY–MID-DEC. 1988

(Continued from page 156)

HAWKINS, VICTORIA: Comeback Favorite	December	39
No Pickup at the Stickup	October	81
HIGHSMITH, PATRICIA: Suspect	November	4
HOCH, EDWARD D.: The Crime Made in Heaven	October	138
Gypsy at Sea	Mid-December	4
Murder of a Gypsy King	July	138
The Problem of the Black Roadster	November	121
The Spy and the Guy Fawkes Bombing	December	86
The Theft of the Faded Flag	September	4
The Victorian Hangman	August	4
HORANSKY, RUBY: Sorry About That, Hon	Mid-December	82
HOWARD, CLARK: The Dakar Run	August	123
Silhouettes	October	4
HUBIN, ALLEN J.: The Jury Box	July-October	
IRELAND, PATRICK: Cheapskate	December	82
Discovery	December	77
JOHNSTON, LINDA O.: Different Drummers	July	48
KEATING, H. R. F.: The Purloined Parvati and Other Artefacts	September	35
LARGE, JOHN: Street Smarts	December	53
LLOYD, ALLAN: The Man Who Wiped Away Footprints	September	94
LOVESEY, PETER: Oracle of the Dead	Mid-December	20
The Wasp	November	58
The Zenobia Hatt Prize	August	20
MARTIN, CARL: Fatherly Love	July	12
Found Money	December	54
A Slightly Less Dangerous Insanity	September	20
MCCONNELL, JEAN: Subplot	July	85
MCINERNY, RALPH: Breathing Free	July	26
MORRIS, H. H.: Fender Bender	October	131
MULLINS, TERRY: The Policeman	Mid-December	47
A Rabbit or a Skunk?	November	83
MURPHY, E. E.: Stealing Away	September	127
NELSON: Death of a Flake	August	85
NEVILLE, LELAND: Writers Anonymous	September	122
NICOLO, CHARLES: A Cast with Character	July	118
NORTHE, JAMES NEILL: A Real Mark	September	19
OLSON, DONALD: Big Sister	October	18
Would I Lie to You?	November	32
O'NEIL, DENNIS: Margaret You Mourn For	November	40
PEAKE, KATY: Too Good To Be True	September	19
PENTECOST, HUGH: The Deadly Spook	October	68

(Continued on page 158)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from page 157)

PIERCE, DAVID: Like Father, or Else	November	91
Somewhere Else	August	32
POE, EDGAR ALLAN: The Black Cat	October	51
POWELL, JAMES: The Cerebus Emerald	October	91
Midnight Pumpkins	September	107
Still Life with Orioles	December	28
QUILL, MONICA: A Sound Investment	Mid-December	91
REED, MARY: Folk Stories	September	89
RYAN-FISHER, BONNIE: Wages of Sin	September	19
SAJAS: Here Be Dragons	October	80
SALLIS, JAMES: Joyride	Mid-December	107
SCOTT, JEFFRY: The Killing Floor	October	118
Quotation Games	Mid-December	123
SHIELDS, JOHN E.: Heavy Date	August	122
SHIELDS, R. P.: An Appetite Could Kill You	July	52
STRIBLING, T. S.: The Mystery of the Choir Boy	Mid-December	67
TAPPLY, WILLIAM G.: A New Man	August	38
THILENIUS, HELEN: A Surprise Solution	Mid-December	39
THOMAS, WILLIAM C.: Case Clothed	September	137
TUDOR, GEORGE W.: Last Will and Testament	October	82
TURNBULL, PETER: Hugo Skillicorn and the Killing Machine	September	138
TWOHY, ROBERT: Everybody Goes Home	Mid-December	130
Highway Girl	July	72
VANDERBILT, HEIDI: Judgments	August	50
VAN DE WETERING, JANWILLEM: Friends	November	96
WAGNER, E. J.: Bright Scissors, Sharp as Pain	September	50
WHITEHEAD, J. W.: The Grey Car	December	104
The Problem	August	86
Unfamiliar Territory	Mid-December	26
The Voice of an Angel	October	28
WILLIAMS, DAVID: Something To Declare	September	56
WOOTON, CARL: Harmony's Song	September	128

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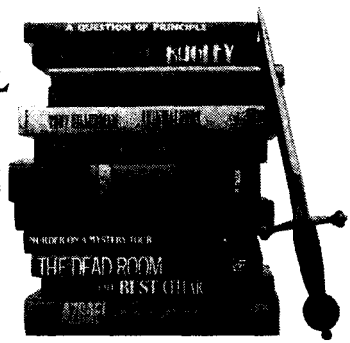

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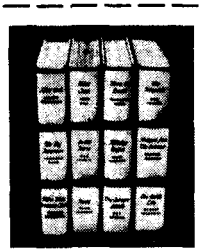

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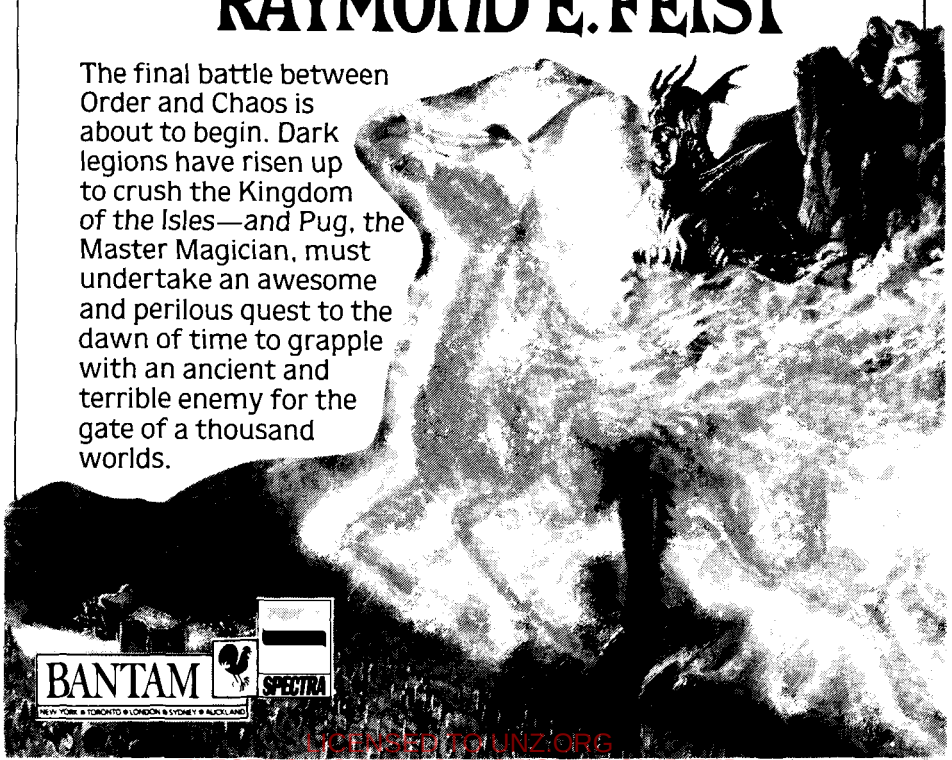

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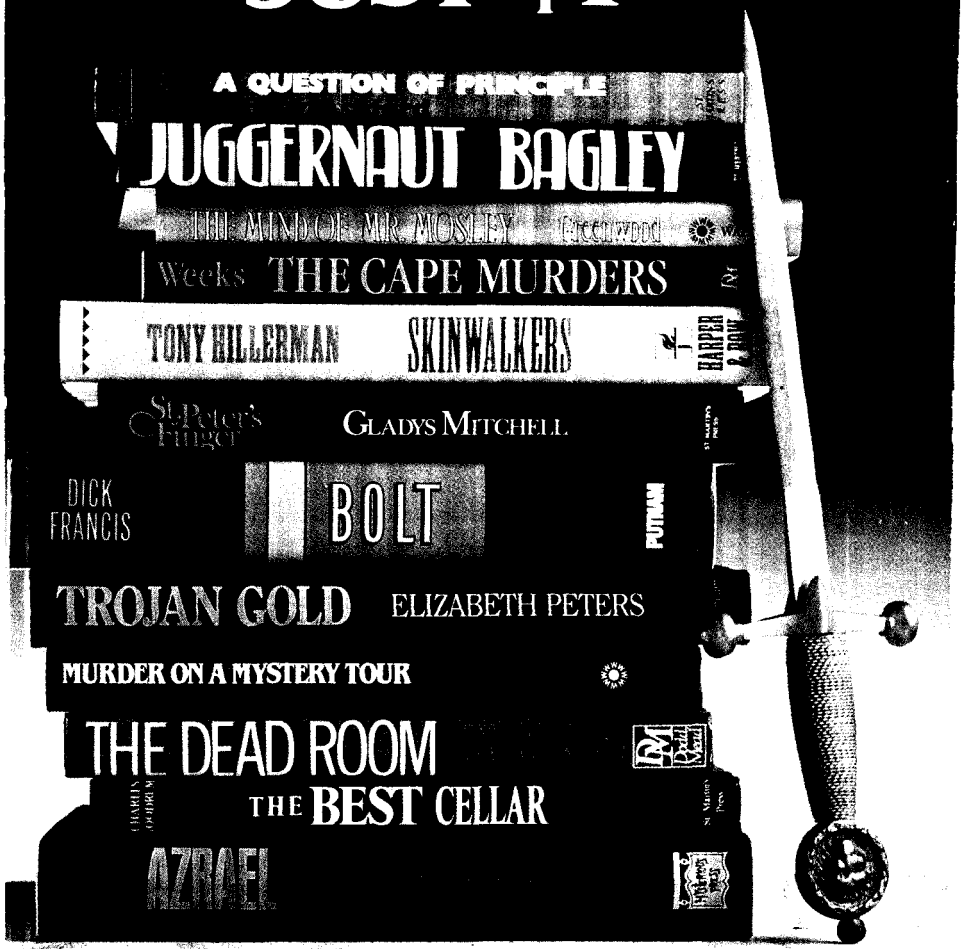

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